From "Defence, Diplomacy, and Development" to "Danger, Distrust and Disaffection": A review of lessons learned from Canada’s war in Afghanistan and its effect on Canadian defence policy, 2001-2014

Derakhshan Qurban-Ali

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Sponsored by: Professor Rodney Haddow
Undergraduate Chair of the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto
ABSTRACT

Shortly following the withdrawal of Canadian troops in Afghanistan in March 2014, the Taliban issued a statement to followers in Kandahar congratulating its fighters in rural districts on the defeat of the Canadians, declaring that Canada had been overcome and has now fled the country. The statement appeared ridiculous to the public and Canadian policy-makers, but its underlying message was felt by locals: the Taliban still maintained strongholds across the country and were not going away any time soon. After 158 Canadian soldiers had been killed, 2000 wounded, and billions of dollars in international aid sent to Afghanistan, it begs the question: i. why did our mission fail and ii. what are the implications for Canada?

The overthrow of the Taliban as a result of the US-led invasion in 2001 sparked hopes among Afghans and the international community that stability would finally be achieved in a country plagued by war for decades; a sense of optimism was profuse throughout the country and Canada played a significant role throughout international operations in Afghanistan. However, poor decisions and an insufficient understanding of the social, political, and economic structure of Afghan society have greatly impeded progress in the development and security spheres. Weak or non-existent government institutions, an ineffective central government with questionable legitimacy, widespread corruption, deteriorating security, increasing poverty, deep ethnic and ideological cleavages and increasing frustration among the Afghan population have all presented a growing threat to stabilization and security in Afghanistan. The essay will analyze the Canadian counter-insurgency and nation-building efforts in Afghanistan, with the goal of highlighting lessons that can be drawn from its Afghan operation.

INTRODUCTION

Following Canada’s withdrawal in March 2014 from its thirteen-year military commitment in Afghanistan, Taliban strongholds remain firm throughout southern Afghanistan, violence continues to escalate, opium production is at record levels, and corruption is rampant. Afghanistan redefined the role of the Canadian military within NATO and was Canada's first major test of its “3D” policy combining defense, development and diplomacy, with mixed results. Although the Canadian Forces have undergone a radical transformation as a result of the Afghan war, it is highly disputable as to whether these changes have made Canada any safer or better respected; whether they have increased its international political clout; and whether these changes were effective in accomplishing the goals set out in the 2008 Manley Panel. After 158 Canadian soldiers have been killed, 2000 wounded, and 18 billion dollars have been spent on Afghanistan, Canada needs to ask: what lessons can be learned from this engagement?

This essay will analyze the Canadian counter-insurgency and nation-building efforts in Afghanistan through an exploration of the discrepancies between decisions made in Ottawa and the realities on the ground in Afghanistan. The analysis will be multi-tiered but will essentially address the errors made on decision-making levels, the flaws in our mission design and rationale, the key challenges to success in Kandahar, and how this mission in Afghanistan has affected the development of Canadian defense policy. Through this analysis, it will be made clear that in order to successfully execute nation-building and counter-insurgency efforts in a country like Afghanistan, Canada needs to address the civilian-military divide, leverage its unique diplomatic capabilities, develop a greater understanding of the geopolitical, historical, and ethnic factors involved in a given regional security complex, and consistently uphold the tenets of Canada’s human rights standards in military conduct abroad.
WHERE DID CANADA SUCCEED?

Following the invocation of NATO’s Article 5 in the aftermath of 9/11, Canada showed solidarity with the US and became engaged on the ground in Afghanistan shortly thereafter. "We mattered," said Chris Alexander, Canada’s ambassador to Afghanistan, when discussing Canada’s role in Kabul. Working with their military counterparts, Chris Alexander and Nipa Banerjee, a CIDA representative, cooperated with Generals Leslie and Devlin to lead one of the most effective large troop contingents in ISAF. Canada became a major player in Afghanistan, which was illustrated clearly during their role in disarming the Afghan warlords’ heavy weaponry.

An early example of Canadian expertise being used to save lives in Afghanistan can be seen during Canada’s mission in Kabul. The Deputy Commander of ISAF, MGen Andrew Leslie, had previously served at National Defence Headquarters and was cognizant of the Canadian Forces’ intelligence and communications capabilities. With this perspective, he employed a Canadian team from All Source Intelligence Centre (ASIC) to the mission, where they “linked army signallers, RCMP, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and Communications Security Establishment assets in Kabul and collected intelligence from a substantial range of sophisticated electronic and, as they were developed and fostered, human sources.”

This ultimately saved lives in Afghanistan because it gave Canada and its allies greater situational awareness. Canadians excelled in the intelligence arena in Kabul because of their expertise, only surpassed by the US and UNAM in the quality of intelligence gathered. The resulting intelligence-sharing gave the Canadian Forces increased clout, respect, and credibility among their allies. The Canadian mission in Kabul was ultimately a success because Canada was able to “post able military and civilian officers and officials in Afghanistan, by equipping its troops adequately for the mission, and by maximizing the effort to collect and disseminate intelligence.”

Rick Hillier’s promotion to ISAF Commander in February 2004 marked an escalation in Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. Hillier’s vision as a leader was evident throughout the mission and he pushed for increased focus on the need to assist the Afghan government in creating effective departments of government and training the bureaucrats to run them. Hillier then created a strategic planning team in Kabul to help teach the basics of responsible governance; Afghan President Hamid Karzai appreciated this assistance and asked Hillier to reinstate the advisory team in 2005. Hillier lobbied for its creation and succeeded in August 2005, when the Canadian Forces established the "Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan." What is significant about the SAT-A is the fact that few other countries could have played a similar role in its creation and acceptance by the Afghan government.

In this regard, trust was the most valuable currency that Canada held with the Afghan government and this is where Canada had pushed for substantial change in areas where their American and British counterparts could not. This is exemplified by the SAT-A’s warm welcome among the Afghan bureaucracy, who were "desperate for assistance and willing to trust the

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Canadians to be expert, impartial, and not looking for a national advantage.”7 Chris Alexander believed that this kind of trust would not have been available to the American advisors.8 The unique leverage and more subtle influence of the SAT-A was invaluable in the creation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy because "no military operation before has actually embedded itself within a host nation's governing circles."9 Being differentiated from the Americans and their foreign policy in this case was a factor that worked in Canada’s favour in Afghanistan.

However, divisions within the Canadian government were felt in Afghanistan as well. The discontinuation of the SAT-A was lamentable and reflected the hostile civil-military relationship present in Ottawa.10 The inability of the civilian and military departments to cooperate led to the destruction of a valuable and effective Canadian assistance program and illustrated deficiencies in Ottawa that had far-reaching consequences during Canada’s mission in Afghanistan.

THE CIVILIAN-MILITARY DIVIDE

In The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar, authors Janice Stein and Eugene Lang probe the deep internal divisions that existed within the civilian and military sectors of the Canadian government’s Department of National Defense: "Civilians can never trust the military leadership, not because they are not trustworthy, but because they have a fundamentally different world view."11 The Canadian civilian and military departments have different worldviews and distinct strengths that can compliment each other when effectively coordinated: this is a key lesson to remember when engaging in future missions. David Mulroney noted one such distinction when he explained, the military excels at “capacity-replacement” but those working in development are more attune to “capacity-building.”12 Stein and Lang examine the relationship between the Civilian Deputy Minister and the Chief of Defence Staff at the Department of National Defence, the only department with two deputy heads that report to the Minister of National Defence.13 They conclude that the separation of the civilian and military departments in the department of National Defence often leads to conflicting opinions and discord, because military and civilian perspectives clash on major issues.14 One of the most pronounced differences of opinion came during the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

Under the leadership of Jean Chrétien, limited and low-risk deployments of naval assets were engaged in response to 9/11.15 Lang and Stein note that even though Canadian sympathy for the American cause was at an all-time high after the attacks in 2001, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was reluctant to be seen as too close to George Bush and the US.16 Whatever the political and economic reality, Chrétien understood the value of having a foreign

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
12 David Mulroney, Personal Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan, December 12, 2014.
13 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 9.
14 Ibid.
15 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 11.
16 Ibid.
policy distinct from that of the United States, which can be seen during the Iraq War when the Canadian government refused to join the American war. However, there was a shift away from the “human security agenda” period of the Chrétien government and the Canadian military was looking to reinvent itself in the post-9/11 era.\(^{17}\) Thus, the Canadian military wanted to elevate its credibility and profile among its NATO allies and the international community, and believed an adjustment of branding was required.

From a military perspective, Afghanistan and the Kandahar PRT was an opportunity for the Canadian Forces to work with the US and prove their military capabilities. The Canadian forces transformed their image from a military largely engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian work to one engaged in counterinsurgency warfare and full-scale combat.\(^{18}\) However, the peacekeeping image was deeply ingrained into the Canadian psyche as part of their national identity and remained widely popular.\(^ {19}\)

Despite this pervasiveness and popularity, Canada’s active military role in Kandahar signified a definite and concrete end to the era of Canadian traditional peacekeeping, which had been declining slowly but surely over the previous decade. In 1991 Canada was supplying 10\% of all the personnel used in UN peacekeeping operations, but by 2007 that had fallen to 0.1 percent.\(^ {20}\) This change of image can be seen starkly through statements from the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, who made this point clearly in 2005 when he said being a soldier "Meant you go out and bayonet somebody. We are not the Public Service of Canada. We are not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces and our job is to be able to kill people."\(^ {21}\) This is in stark contrast to former Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham's statement following 9/11, where he stated: "Our role in Afghanistan is quintessentially Canadian: we are helping rebuild a troubled country and we are giving hope for the future to a long-suffering people. This is a clear example of our Canadian values at work."\(^ {22}\)

“STEPPING ON A LANDMINE”: WAS COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN KANDAHAR A MISTAKE?

On 16 May 2005, Defence Minister Bill Graham announced that Canada would take on a new mission in Kandahar Province and would increase its overall troop deployment in Afghanistan.\(^ {23}\) Chris Alexander explained, "We recommended Kandahar from the start. Everyone knew it was going to be a pivotal province. As Kandahar goes, so goes Afghanistan."\(^ {24}\) Although the decision to go to Kandahar was a collective one among different governmental departments,\(^ {25}\) it was not necessarily an informed decision. Kandahar was viewed as a pivotal province because it was the heart and birthplace of the Taliban and supposedly “only the Canadians could be trusted to do this job.”\(^ {26}\) However, there were serious intelligence gaps regarding Pakistan’s influence through the porous border and the strength of the insurgency. The


\(^ {18}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 196.

\(^ {19}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 19.


\(^ {22}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 199.


\(^ {24}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 133.


\(^ {26}\) Ibid.
Canadian Forces proved themselves to be both effective and skilled in both Kabul and Kandahar; however, it is imperative to analyze whether Canada might have been more effective in another location. There is evidence to suggest that NATO’s mission in Afghanistan may have been more successful had Canada pursued a different PRT route.

The Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) called Bill Graham to suggest that Canada send its PRT to work in remote villages in central Afghanistan, around Chaghcharan, halfway between Herat and Kabul. However, the military immediately dismissed this idea because they argued that this part of the country would give Canada inadequate international visibility. Graham also received a phone call from the new NATO Secretary-General and former Dutch foreign minister, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who urged him to send the Canadian PRT to work in the Chaghcharan district in partnership with the Lithuanians. Early indicators pointed towards Chaghcharan and Brussels urged this option, but Kandahar was the preferred option for the Canadian military, although it was far more complicated and dangerous.

Chaghcharan was one of the poorest and least developed parts of Afghanistan and was in desperate need of assistance. However, because Italy would have a high-profile PRT in Herat, a Canadian presence in Chaghcharan would be "under Italian influence" and this was unacceptable to Canadian military leadership. Italy was also interested in working together with Canada in Herat, but this option was also taken off the table; thus, military goals of being visible were placed ahead of NATO’s request to pursue a PRT in a much-needed region. Ironically, civilian officials advised that Kandahar—the homeland and birthplace of the Taliban next to the porous Pakistani border—was safer than the Chaghcharan district. This belies a serious intelligence failure. When Canadians began their combat operations in Kandahar province, it became glaringly apparent that the conditions in Kandahar were far more dangerous than anyone had anticipated. Bill Graham later reflected, "The hornets’ nest we poked had a hell of a lot more hornets than anybody thought."

Canadian Forces redeployed from Kabul to Kandahar in 2006, and Canada committed to the Kandahar PRT—one out of 26 PRTs—made up of 335 people from the Canadian Forces, Foreign Affairs, CIDA, RCMP, and Correctional Service Canada. Although the Canadian military believes that Kandahar was pacified to some extent, those working and living on the ground have a different perspective on the state of southern Afghanistan. By analyzing the surges of troops and the resulting surges of violence, Graeme Smith, foreign correspondent for The Globe and Mail, concluded that Kandahar is "orders of magnitude more violent than when we started." The government made a decision based on militarily self-interested advice and information and suffered significant soldier casualties as a result. Graeme Smith also noted that the security advisor to the Kandahar governor was prescient in his reading of politics when

27 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 153.
28 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 137.
29 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 135.
30 Ibid.
31 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 232.
32 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 233.
35 Graeme Smith, Personal Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, December 1, 2014.
36 David Mulroney, Personal Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan, December 12, 2014.
From “Defence, Diplomacy, and Development” to “Danger, Distrust and Disaffection”  Qurban-Ali

witnessing first-hand the hand-over of Kandahar from US to Canadian authority; he stated, “the Americans planted a landmine and you just stepped on it.” The Manley Panel reflects the severe results: “the intensity of insurgency in the South, and the relatively large number of Canadian soldiers active there, together help to explain why Canadians have suffered high casualty rates. But the Panel could elicit no conclusive explanation for the disproportionately high casualty rates suffered by Canadians in Afghanistan.” The rest of this paper will partially explain why Canadians suffered high casualty rates in Kandahar and what should be learned from this experience.

LIMITATIONS AND THE MANLEY REPORT

The Canadian military leadership had big visions for the future, but they were limited by both internal and external factors. The Canadian Forces were at "the tail end of the decade of darkness and there was no light on the horizon for increased government funding.” David Mulroney, former Deputy Minister responsible for the Afghanistan Task Force, noted that the government took a decision based on self-interested information provided by the military. Going on to summarize a key lesson to learn, he reflected, "we went into Afghanistan and into Kandahar, without enough equipment, without enough soldiers, knowing that the Americans were already engaging in Iraq so they wouldn't be able to help us; and then we complained about all those things afterwards. So there is a shocking failure of government to appreciate or understand what it was getting into.” If the Canadian Forces were ill equipped for the Kandahar mission, it would have been prudent to take a closer look at options more suitable to their capabilities.

Hillier commented on the lack of vision within the Canadian and NATO mission in Afghanistan: "It was crystal clear from the start that there was no strategy for the mission...no clear articulation of what they wanted to achieve, no political guidance and few forces. It was abysmal." The Manley Report revealed that the Canadian mission in Kandahar lacked a coherent Canadian strategy even after two years of engagement. The Manley Panel then listed four reasons justifying Canada’s engagement in Kandahar: to take part in “an international response to the threat to peace and security inherent in al Qaeda’s terrorist attacks;” to support the United Nations; to support NATO; and to promote and protect “human security in fragile states.”

Mulroney believes the two biggest mistakes Canada and NATO made were firstly, not setting realistic goals and time frames for international engagement in Afghanistan and secondly, failing to reconcile the basic conflict of those who saw Afghanistan as a military mission and those who saw it as a development mission. Mulroney also believes that trying to modernize Afghanistan too quickly was a mistake and that instead, Canada and NATO should have tried to return Afghanistan to 1976 levels (prior to the Soviet invasion), where Afghanistan controlled its

37 Graeme Smith, Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada’s mission in Afghanistan.
40 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
44 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
own borders, had a degree of internal security, and had an active economy. Attempting to modernize Afghanistan too radically was erroneous because it did not take into account the cultural realities of the war-torn country. For example, the 2004 Constitution required a higher percentage of female parliamentarians in Kabul than existed in the British, Canadian, and US counterparts.

As a result of the Manley Report, by 2008-2009, David Mulroney believed the Canadian mission to be among the best in NATO, in terms of unifying the actions of the civilian and military sectors. He noted, “the biggest challenge I had once I became the coordinator at PCO, was to encourage the Canadian Forces to open up and to encourage CIDA to open up. But what made it much easier was that by that time, we had through the Manley Panel and through the Parliamentary motion, a much more careful definition of what the mission was all about. People couldn't hide behind ambiguity; I could say—with the Manley Report and the parliamentary motion on my desk—this is what we've been asked to do, how can you contribute to that?”

AN ALTERNATIVE TO KANDAHAR?

David Mulroney reflected on where Canada could have gone if not Kandahar: Years later, when I got back to Bamiyan and saw the New Zealanders working there, I thought: It would've been incredible if Canada had been engaged here [in Bamiyan]. New Zealand couldn't do a lot in Bamiyan, because it was a small country; we could have done a great deal. We could have done a great deal to restore agricultural technology and what we could have done and provided, was something that Afghanistan really needed: a success. The Germans and others were in the North, but they weren't very active. So you could've had Canada in a place that was susceptible to change, with an actor that was willing to contribute to that change. I think we missed a tremendous opportunity.

The Manley report noted that Canada had very experienced and skilled personnel in Afghanistan, but for security reasons and because of the unstable and kinetic environment in Kandahar, CIDA staff and others were unable to make frequent contact with the local populations they were tasked with assisting. Mulroney elaborated on this: “If you had created a success in one place, as Canada could have in Changcharan, Daikundi or in Bamiyan ...then all of a sudden, people could start to get optimistic about the Canadian model you can learn from. We achieved a great deal in Kandahar, I'm very proud of that, but we could have achieved a great deal more in a place that was a little bit less—as the military say, kinetic—meaning, full of armed conflict.” Had Canada been involved in a more secure and cooperative province, an eager and cooperative population could have actively engaged the same level of expertise on the field with much more visible results.

One factor that contributed to the high number of Canadian casualties in Kandahar was the fact that Afghans in Kandahar had increased incentives to switch sides when they did not see progress with the government. Unlike provinces to the North and West, the Taliban enjoyed a

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45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
greater base of support from the Pashtuns in Kandahar, relative to the rest of Afghanistan because many Pashtuns view the Taliban as a way to preserve their political interests. The Taliban are a Sunni Muslim and ethnic Pashtun movement that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001.52 Chaghcharan, Bamiyan, and Daikundi are examples of provinces that are predominantly ethnically Tajik or Hazara, where NATO receives significant support because these groups have the most to lose in the case of Taliban resurgence. In Bamiyan, Daikundi, and the rest of Hazarajat, the reason for this is mainly ethnic; these provinces are predominantly Hazara, an ethnic tribe in Afghanistan that has historically been persecuted and targeted by the Pashtuns and the Taliban. In other Northern provinces formerly under the control of the Northern Alliance, the populations have also historically fought against the Taliban.53 As Rasanayagam points out, the Taliban were successful in disarming Pashtun warlords in the 1990s because they were perceived to be motivated by religion and were not tied to any particular tribal affiliation. Conversely, the Taliban were met with armed resistance when they tried to disarm the Uzbek and Hazara militias in Mazar-i-Sharif in September 1997.54

To be successful in counterinsurgency, you need to have a regime that is viewed as legitimate by at least 85 percent of the population.55 Had Canada focused on areas where the government and foreign troops enjoyed greater support from the locals, long-term security would have been a more feasible goal because it could have garnered support from 85 percent of the people. Instead, NATO neglected and alienated many of these areas in aid and development projects, which have some of the poorest and marginalized populations. While some of these areas still lacked a single paved road, the Canadian mission in Kandahar was “repaving the same road after attacks, back and forth from their main base in Kandahar to the main highway, which cost Canada millions and millions of dollars.”56 Solidifying gains outside of Taliban strongholds may have been a more effective route towards stability.

THE AFGHAN LENS: MISTAKES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The Taliban

It is important to differentiate the Taliban from al-Qaeda, and to differentiate different Taliban factions from one another. As is pointed out in Talibanistan, "Muddying important differences with imprecise terminology leads to imprecise analysis and imprecise policy."57 This is the basis for much of the misguided policy and strategy during the Canadian and NATO engagement in Afghanistan. What is acknowledged is that the Taliban are local, Pashtun, located in southern and eastern Afghanistan and in the border/tribal areas of Pakistan; their ambitions are local, while al-Qaeda's are global.58 Janice Stein and Eugene Lang define the Taliban as “part of a larger, loosely connected group of disaffected warlords, drug traffickers, and commanders who

52 Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan, Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan: 12.
56 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
58 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 228.
have joined the insurgency for politics or profit.”

Painting different factions of the Taliban and al-Qaeda with the same broad brush is highly problematic. With respect to the “War on Terror,” a more effective strategy from NATO would have been to acknowledge “there are sixty different groups in sixty different countries who all have different objectives” because in order to defeat an enemy, it is critical “to define the enemy as narrowly as you can get away with.”

There are many different factions of Taliban active in Afghanistan, including the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Omar, the Haqqani Network led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, and Hizb-i-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The “Pakistani Taliban” often refers to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the pan-FATA militant coalition that engages in violence against the Pakistani state. Each of these groups has their own ambitions and tactics, and should be dealt with in a way that is cognizant of these differences. Steele summarizes this idea when he explains, the key to winning a war is to “know your enemy” and getting that basic point wrong leads to mistake after mistake, which can be seen in Kandahar when international troops were unable to differentiate civilians from insurgents.

Although the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban are distinct groups, there is considerable misunderstanding about the political and geographic boundaries that separate them. The border that separates Afghanistan and Pakistan matters more to foreign nations and international organizations than it does to the Pashtuns who have lived there for centuries. There are twice as many Pashtuns on the Pakistani side of the border than there are on the Afghan side and tribes/trading relationships greatly overlap and interlace on both sides of the border. The truth of the matter is that the Durand Line that separates the two countries is an imperially imposed line that does not take into account the social realities on the ground near the border; thus, military policy designed around this arbitrary border runs a high risk of being out of touch, irrelevant, and ineffective.

Understanding the Pashtun ethnicity and culture is key to understanding the Taliban revival in southern provinces such as Kandahar, and by extension, it is key to understanding how Canada and NATO could have better controlled or curbed the resurgence. The Taliban are mainly made up of Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, concentrated in the southern and eastern provinces of the country. It is no coincidence that the revival of the Taliban was based out of the traditional homeland of the Pashtuns. Locals in these provinces felt as though the national government—comprised of many members of the former Northern Alliance—discriminated against Pashtuns and in favor of northern Tajiks and Uzbeks. The Taliban exploited these grievances and presented themselves as an alternative to the corrupt government, as a group that would promote Pashtun interests.

Many Pashtuns thus view the war between the government and the Taliban as an ethnically and tribally motivated one. It is easy to see why this view is perpetuated when one

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59 Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 217.
60 Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 229.
61 Bergen and Tiedemann, *Talibanistan*: 351.
63 Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*: 43.
64 Bergen and Tiedemann, *Talibanistan*: 351.
65 Bergen and Tiedemann, *Talibanistan*: 351.
68 Ibid.
observes that in some provinces, the Afghan National Army is only three percent Pashtun.69 This made the national army appear as foreign to southern provinces as the foreign countries they were working with and gave the impression that the current war was just a continuation of the civil war, with different ethnic-groups backed by different superpowers in a battle for control over the country. This perception was compounded by the mistreatment of Taliban prisoners captured by Dostum’s forces during the military operations that followed 9/11, where over 4000 Taliban members died while being transported or held in overcrowded freight containers.70 In line with the Pashtunwali code of honour and revenge, Najibullah Lafraie, the mujahedin's foreign minister from 1992-1996 contends, "the tens of thousands of revenge-seeking relatives of those victims provided a large pool of potential recruits to the Taliban" that ultimately set up a Taliban revival among Pashtun populations.71

Although former Afghan President Hamid Karzai was Pashtun, the divisions among Pashtun Afghans then became tribal, as some Pashtun tribes felt disenfranchised and complained that only the few tribes associated with the Karzai government were benefitting from the new government.72 Thus, the hearts and minds of many Pashtun Afghans were with the Taliban as the government failed to provide them with security and representation. Through this strategy, the Taliban was able to infiltrate all levels of the Afghan government. In Baghlan (a province where security deteriorated in 2010) the provincial governor told reporters in January 2011, "I can tell you this very clearly: fifty percent of the people who are working with the Afghan government, their hearts are with the Taliban."73 Whether for ideological, economic, political or pragmatic reasons, the Afghan government was brimming with personnel who did not serve the interests of the country and actively sought to undermine the government’s efforts. Thus, a strategy based on bolstering the Afghan government and army until they became strong enough to defeat the Taliban was unlikely to succeed, because the Taliban had already infiltrated and gained influence over different levels of government and their operational reach have been “qualitatively and geographically expanding.”74 This is an example of poor strategy based on misinformation.

This is evident to Afghans and thus, they are wary to be seen as supporting a foreign-backed government because the Taliban kill those who work foreigners. In Kandahar, two thirds of the 119 budgeted government jobs in the city remained unfilled because municipal workers were assassinated or quit from pressure. Kandahar Mayor Hamid Haidari told reporters that “Nobody wants to work with me—they’re all afraid … everyone wants to stay alive.”75 On 15 April 2011, Kandahar’s police chief, General Khan Mohammad Mujahid, was assassinated in the main police compound when a man in police uniform detonated himself.76 The Manley report suggested that Afghan public opinion remained hostile to any return of Taliban rule, however it also noted, "Many Afghans, having suffered in the past and now experiencing the uncertainties of daily life, are hedging their bets against the future—not investing any wholehearted loyalty either in the government or in the Taliban."77 Thus, for reasons of personal security and

69 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 345.
70 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 285.
71 Ibid.
73 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 25.
74 Ibid.
75 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 35.
76 Ibid.
77 Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan, Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan: 15.
pragmatism, Afghans tended to side with the group who had more power in a region, which was usually the Taliban in southern and eastern provinces. This is part of why Canada could not pacify the Taliban resurgence in most of Kandahar.

Chris Alexander, Canada’s first Ambassador to Afghanistan, echoes similar ideas when he warns:

We have to be very careful.... about tarring everyone with the same brush. Taliban are religious students. There will always be Taliban in Afghanistan and we should welcome that. The ones who are a problem for NATO and indeed for Afghanistan are the militant ones, the extremist ones, the ones who are fighting...but there are thousands, probably tens of thousands, who are willing to join this government to help rebuild their country if they are invited, welcomed, and in the right way. And we need to think about how that hand of cooperation can be extended and how the process of reconciliation in Afghanistan can be deepened.78

Timing, however, is everything. Had the Karzai government and Western forces made a serious offer of reconciliation to the Taliban in 2002, they could have prevented the Taliban resurgence and increase in violence that resulted from attempting to eradicate the Taliban instead of integrating them into the country.79 Instead, NATO and the US gave power to regional strongmen who revived the opium trade and marginalized large swaths of the population.

It is critical to examine why NATO pursued this policy. If it was based on the belief that the Taliban are terrorists and a threat to global security, that has been proven false by many different sources, including Graeme Smith’s Emmy-award winning Talking to the Taliban documentary series. This series asks Taliban members about their motivations for fighting and reveals that the vast majority of their motivations are based on local grievances, such as retaliation for NATO air strikes, night raids, or poppy crop eradication.80 This is in contrast to General Hillier’s rationale for the Kandahar mission, which was focused on getting rid of terrorists (i.e. Taliban) who might pose a risk to the West.81 Richard H. Smyth, a professor of international relations at the US Army War College, noted the general Taliban lack of interest in global jihad in these videos and Graeme Smith, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, explains that this is a hard fact to accept in political and military circles, because it “undermined the whole argument for war.”82

In January 2015, the White House deputy press secretary declined to call the Taliban terrorists, but rather, an armed insurgency because they do not have the same global goals as groups such as al-Qaeda.83 Ironically, the West indirectly supports the individuals who have actually helped terrorist networks and have strong ties to extremists, such as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (who invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan), by bolstering the national government full of warlords and criminals. In Death of the Liberal Class, Chris Hedges summarizes this paradox: “What good are a quarter-million well-trained Afghan troops to a nation slipping into famine? What purpose does a strong military serve with a corrupt and inept government in place? What is

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78 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 218.
81 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 201.
the point of getting rid of the Taliban if it means killing civilians with airstrikes and supporting a
government of misogynist warlords and criminals?"  

With all this in mind, it doesn’t make logical sense to hunt down the Taliban and
eradicate them, because “the Taliban are a movement, not a discrete number of fighters.” who
represent an alienated—yet substantial—segment of Afghan society. If former mujahideen
leaders and warlords who committed grave civil-war era crimes, human rights abuses and
massacres can be reintegrated into Afghan society for the sake of peace, what then is the
justification behind preventing moderate Taliban members from doing the same? A practical
goal would be to achieve some level of stability, so that the country can begin to move forward,
because neither side can win militarily and attempting to do so will only prolong instability and
suffering and lead to another catastrophic civil war. As violence escalates, it is clear that peace
cannot be realized in Afghanistan through military means, and a political solution is the only
option left. This is a vital lesson Canada and NATO can take from their mission in Afghanistan.

REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX

The current war in Afghanistan must also be framed in the context of its neighbours in
order to be fully understood. When Canada decided to deploy troops to Kandahar in 2005, the
role of Pakistan was not fully appreciated by those in Ottawa. Former Minister of National
Defence, Bill Graham, noted this knowledge gap when he acknowledged in 2011: “We knew
much less than we should have about Kandahar. There was little expertise within the government
on the languages, culture, history, and not a great deal of intelligence. We tended to discuss the
mission almost entirely as a NATO matter, with less attention to things like the regional
geopolitics, the porous border, the Pakistani dimension, solving the question of Kashmir…”

Failing to understand how ISI-supported sanctuaries and safe havens in Pakistan combined with
the porous border would affect the mission in Kandahar was a significant intelligence failing and
indicates that there needs to be greater dialogue between regional experts and the Canadian
government and military. Conflicts need to be understood through the lens of regional security
complexes and Canada needs to place greater emphasis on grasping the “tactical, operational,
and strategic contexts in which its troops will operate.”

Pakistan

A key consideration when dealing with Afghanistan is its relationship with Pakistan. In
Canada in Afghanistan, Peter Pigott posits that Pakistan views Afghanistan as its rightful client
state since 1947 and that “its real and historic enemy is India, whose growing influence in
Afghanistan it fears.” This belief is reinforced by the fact that President Hamid Karzai was
educated in India and has allowed the Indian government to open consulates in Kandahar and
Jalalabad, Pashtun strongholds in Pakistan’s backyard; moreover, India is playing a significant
role in the construction of the new Afghan parliament buildings and has a large food-aid program
in the country.

88 Pigott, Canada in Afghanistan: The War so Far (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Group, 2007): 199.
89 Pigott, Canada in Afghanistan: 199.
Thus, gaining control over Afghanistan by covertly supporting certain factions of the Taliban serves Pakistan’s national interests as part of its “strategic depth” policy. In this context, Afghanistan should be viewed as a battlefield for a proxy war between India and Pakistan. This should be taken into consideration when NATO forms alliances with or gives funding to Pakistan, because achieving military objectives in Afghanistan becomes increasingly difficult when regional allies are unreliable or untrustworthy. The consequences of failing to understand Pakistan’s key role in propelling the conflict are not just inconvenient, but dangerous. Pigott cites NATO sources when he points out that attacks against ISAF rose by 300 percent after Musharraf’s accord with militants when he points out that attacks against ISAF rose by 300 percent after Musharraf’s accord with militants in the summer of 2006.90

Thomas F. Lynch III of the National Defense University, former special assistant to the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, believes that al-Qaeda has been strategically defeated since bin Laden’s death in 2011 and that instead of hunting down terrorists, there should be a strong focus now on preventing a proxy war in Afghanistan, between a Pakistani-backed Taliban and Indian-backed parts of the former Northern Alliance (via the present Afghan government).91 Lynch views the war through a regional lens, as “a Pakistani-supported Pashtun rebellion against a Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara-dominated Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with links to New Delhi and Tehran, and only a fig-leaf of Pashtun representation in the form of President Hamid Karzai, who is completely mistrusted in Pakistan as too cozy with India.”92

Pakistan fears “hegemonic encirclement” by India and Afghanistan, so the Pakistani military and intelligence services used the Afghan Taliban to prevent this, as an effective vehicle through which Pakistan could extend its foreign policy arm.93 It did this by capitalizing on the grievances of the disenfranchised conservative rural Pashtuns and undermining the national government.94 Thus, in order to combat this influence, the grievances of the disenfranchised should be addressed in a way that allows moderate supporters of the Afghan Taliban to better integrate into Afghan society and politics. Moreover, major stakeholders need to push for India, Pakistan, and regional neighbours to reach a diplomatic solution that respects both Afghanistan’s sovereignty and each country’s geopolitical concerns.95

David Mulroney believes Pakistan to have been the country most dangerous to global and Canadian security and acknowledged that the ISI (Pakistan’s Intelligence Service) has the deaths of both Afghans and Canadians on its hands by being notoriously complicit in re-equipping the Taliban.96 Pakistan has more than sixty Pashtun tribes and four hundred clans and sub-clans; there are fifteen million Pashtuns in Afghanistan and twenty eight million in Pakistan, separated by an arbitrary and porous imperially-imposed border called the Durand Line.97 Canada—in addition to NATO—was wholly ineffective in putting significant pressure on Pakistan to curb their support of the Taliban because there was a fear that it would alienate Pakistan and because Canada’s diplomacy is “fractured and incomplete.”98 Graeme Smith believes that in order to

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90 Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan*: 199.
91 Bergen and Tiedemann, *Talibanistan*: xvi.
92 Bergen and Tiedemann, *Talibanistan*: 405.
96 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
98 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
address this, the West needs to support the democratization of Pakistan by encouraging civilian control over all aspects of the state, including foreign affairs and security.99

An effective, connected diplomacy is key to moving forward in Afghanistan. Part of this entails a serious examination of the “tremendously un-humble role Saudi Arabia plays in the spread of global terrorism” in Afghanistan and throughout the Middle East and Asia. This means addressing the role of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, while also bringing interested regional players like China and India to the table. Until NATO addresses Saudi Arabia’s funding of radical militant Islamists around the world and Pakistan’s regional interests in supporting the Taliban, it will be addressing the symptoms of terrorism as opposed to the root causes of it.

LOSING LEGITIMACY: “IT’S THE SAME DONKEY, BUT WITH A NEW SADDLE”

The lack of legitimacy possessed by the Afghan government coupled with its corrupt practices ultimately led to the downfall of the international mission. When addressing the legitimate grievances of anti-government forces, the Afghan government must be discussed because a large part of NATO’s shortfalls in Afghanistan can be directly attributed to the corrupt Karzai regime and the general population’s frustration with the lack of development.101 Although Canada did not have control over who was elected, it was still partly responsible for the morally questionable individuals it chose to bolster and work with. Furthermore, the corruption, brutality, and criminality of the Afghan National Security Forces (Afghan National Army and Police) played a large role in turning the population against the Karzai government. In Zabul, Helmand, and elsewhere, all Taliban insurgents had to do was "approach the victims of the pro-Karzai strongmen and promise them protection and support."102

Afghan Government

Malalai Joya, the youngest elected member to the Afghan parliament from 2005-2007, described the government as composed of some of the “worst abusers of human rights that our country has ever known.”103 She was dismissed from Parliament following her famous speech that publicly condemned the presence of warlords and war criminals in the Afghan government, who she believes should be tried for war crimes instead of granted government power. She mentions numerous examples of well-known fundamentalists with bloody histories, such as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Joya reminds readers in her memoir that Sayyaf was the man who first invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan in the 1980s, trained and mentored the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, and ordered the massacre of thousands of civilians in Kabul during the civil war.104 Human Rights Watch reported that Sayyaf’s forces used intimidation and bribery to get him elected to the Loya Jirga,105 yet he remains a prominent political figure in Afghanistan and was even a contender for the 2014 Presidential elections.

To illustrate her point about the questionable characters within the Afghan government, Joya also uses the example of Burhannudin Rabbani, “a mullah and leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami

99 Graeme Smith, Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada’s mission in Afghanistan.
100 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
105 Ibid.
fundamentalists, who had issued the rules for women that were as bad as the Taliban’s.”106 With Parliament made up of human rights abusers with little regard for women’s rights, it is easier to understand why many Afghan civilians do not see the same stark differentiation between the government and the Taliban that the West does. The lines are further blurred when one observes how often Afghans switch sides according to the current political realities: before Hamid Karzai was President of Afghanistan, he was the Taliban’s designated UN representative in 1996.107 Karzai later distanced himself from this post not because he disagreed with the Taliban’s ideology or policies, but because he disliked the Taliban’s close relationship with Pakistan’s ISI; he was concerned with the amount of influence it held over the movement.108 President Karzai is largely seen as a Western puppet among Afghans and holds very little legitimacy among populations outside of Kabul.

The goals in the Manley Panel were contradictory in this area, because supporting the government and supporting women’s rights were often mutually exclusive choices. During the Liberal government’s term, Canada financed a women’s radio station in Herat. Bill Graham recalls that the station was quite successful in raising awareness of women’s rights but the Herat governor shut it down and the Canadian government couldn’t do anything about it.109 Canada was ready to finance the project, but the Afghan government was not prepared to accept such initiatives. Thus, the Afghan government supports women’s rights in theory, but in practice, their actions are not significantly better than the Taliban’s. This is evident through numerous examples where women’s rights were reduced to a political bargaining chip.

In March 2009, President Karzai signed off the Shiite Personal Status Law, better known as the “Marital Rape Law” by the West, which essentially reduced women to property and legalized marital rape.110 According to Unifem, 87 percent of Afghan women are beaten on a regular basis111; the oppression of women is widespread, especially when coupled with illiteracy and poverty, and will take generations to eliminate. However, women’s rights are not a foreign concept to Afghanistan. In the 1960s and 1970s, half the country’s doctors, teachers and civil servants were women, but what changed—aside from war—is that “the most backward and misogynistic men of the country gained power.”112 First it was the Taliban, then it became the Western-backed mujahideen and mullahs needed to secure the country. Thus, by bolstering misogynistic warlords and former mujahideen for the sake of securing areas from the Taliban, the West inadvertently reinforced the oppression of women while trying to liberate them. This contradicts the goals relating to protecting human security in the Manley Report.

Afghan National Security Forces

Furthermore, for many Afghans, the only direct experience they have with the government is through the Afghan police and army, who have a terrible track record of looting, misconduct, and abuse of power. For this reason, villagers often believe the Afghan police to be more predatory than the Taliban. Graeme Smith documents how this is conveyed through the language used during his interviews: he notes that locals never used the Pashto word for “police”
when talking about law enforcement. Instead, Afghans called the security forces *topakan*, which loosely translates to “gun lord” or “warlord.”\(^{113}\) This is pivotal to understanding the revival of the Taliban because it directly parallels the emergence of the Taliban following the civil war. As Smith explains, the *topakan* were originally brave members of the mujahideen who had expelled the Soviet army; however, the resulting power vacuum caused a civil war, as factions of the mujahideen fought against one another:

Rebels who had defended the country turned into petty marauders--*topakan*--squabbling with each other for territory. For local police to be tarred with the label *topakan* meant they had become the worst sort of brigands in the eyes of the people. These grievances were exploited by the Taliban, who had presented themselves as a way of removing the *topakan* during the establishment of their original regime in 1994.\(^{114}\)

Following Operation Medusa, farmers complained that Afghan policemen were behaving like gangs by sweeping in behind Canadian forces to ransack homes, burn shops, and extort valuables. The head of the UN mission in southern Afghanistan explained, "Maybe half of these so-called anti-government elements acting here in this area of the south, they had to join this Taliban movement because of the misbehaviour of these bad guys."\(^{115}\) Moreover, the drug industry in Afghanistan is increasingly proliferated and exploited by government officials and Taliban alike.\(^{116}\) Although 73 percent of Afghans viewed the Taliban negatively in 2007\(^{117}\), they are seen as oftentimes the only recourse by disaffected citizens tired of government corruption.

Civilian aversion to corruption helped drive support for Taliban in southern provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar, because although the Taliban took money through taxes, Afghans noted that they did not demand bribes\(^{118}\) in the same way that members of the Afghan government, police, and army did. The Canadian strategy in Kandahar failed to take this into account and pushing a strategy based on bolstering a police force that holds little legitimacy and credibility among the southern Afghan population was ultimately flawed, although well meaning. Western forces, including Canada, have been so keen on making this strategy work that they have turned a blind eye to the degenerate behavior of some members of the Afghan security forces. British commanders in Helmand province estimated that sixty percent of Afghan police are on drugs\(^{119}\) and Canadian soldiers have witnessed the sodomization of young boys by members of the Afghan security forces with no consequences.\(^{120}\)

The widespread and abject poverty around the country played a big role in motivating predatory police practices. Although billions of dollars have been invested into Afghanistan from the international community, the majority of this aid did not reach the civilians who needed it most because of corrupt government officials and ineffective contractors. It is estimated that only ten percent of aid was actually used to help alleviate civilian suffering.\(^{121}\) Police often resort to extortion and looting as a result of destitution and higher-level corruption; some police units do

\(^{113}\) Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*: 84.  
\(^{114}\) Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*: 84.  
\(^{115}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 221.  
\(^{116}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 225.  
\(^{117}\) Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan, *Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan*: 89.  
\(^{118}\) Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*: 206.  
\(^{120}\) Jones, “Meet the Afghan Army”: 75.  
\(^{121}\) Hedges, *Death of the Liberal Class*: 52.
not receive their salary for months because higher officers siphon funds from the pay system. Moreover, many Afghan men who support the Taliban joined the Afghan National Army not because they supported the government, but because it at least provided income and food during ten weeks of training. However, Chris Sands points out that this is “a needlessly complicated way to unintentionally deliver such minimal humanitarian aid… Some of these circulating soldiers are aging former mujahideen and many are undoubtedly Taliban.” Some argue that the money spent on building up the Afghan security forces would have gone further if it were spent on alleviating poverty through investment in agriculture, health care, and a civilian job corps.

UNSAVORY ALLIES: “THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND”

The Manley Panel made a clear distinction between the Canadian forces and the combatants they were fighting: “Afghanistan is at war, and Canadians are combatants. It is a war fought between an elected, democratic government and a zealous insurgency of proven brutality.” However, the reality is not as black and white. The military makes questionable allies in its “war on terror” because it tends to support people who can provide security against the Taliban at any cost. However, without understanding the historical and tribal dynamics of a region before championing some of these men, the West risks unknowingly inflaming local tensions and worsening the problem in the long-run. The Western support of General Abdul Raziq in Kandahar is a prime example of short-term military gains at the cost of long-term political instability.

In The Dogs Are Eating Them Now, Haji Mohammed Qassam, a provincial council member representing a branch of the Barakzai tribe (a group that generally aligned itself with the foreign troops in Kandahar), explained why villagers might rebel against a government that was bringing large amounts of foreign aid. He stated that among the biggest mistakes made by Westerners and the Afghan government was bringing in a commander named Abdul Raziq in the summer of 2006 in order to curb the Taliban’s advance into Panjwai valley. “Colonel Raziq” was the commander of the Afghan Border Police in a district near the Pakistani border, but in 2006, his forces consisted of a militia predominantly made up of members of the Achakzai tribe. The Achakzai had been feuding for centuries with another major tribe, the Noorzai, who are inhabitants of the area southwest of Kandahar city.

Thus, “when the government dispatched Mr. Raziq there in August, the locals did not view the action as an exercise of authority by the central government; instead, they saw an incursion by their tribal enemy.” The police already had an abysmal reputation for looting and extorting civilians, but rumours spread that Raziq planned to kill not only Taliban but also all members of the Noorzai tribe, because there were many people with connections to the Taliban. Thus, Raziq and the government forces were up against an armed uprising of Noorzai tribe members who feared indiscriminate slaughter at the hands of the Achakzai-led force. This

122 Smith, The Dogs Are Eating Them Now: 82.
124 Jones, “Meet the Afghan Army”: 78.
125 Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan, Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan: 7.
126 Smith, The Dogs Are Eating Them Now: 82.
127 Ibid.
128 Smith, The Dogs Are Eating Them Now: 82.
resulted in the ambushing and killing of many police officers. Mr. Qassam concluded that it was “a bad idea, to bring Abdul Raziq. One village had ten or twenty fighters against the government before he came—and the next day, maybe two hundred.”

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NARCO-STATE

The “War on Terror” conflicted with the “War on Drugs” in Afghanistan, and the goals outlined in the Manley Report were compromised as a result. This can partially be attributed to the fact that NATO states partnered with anti-Taliban warlords in order to gain control over the country. As a result, individuals who had been involved in severe human rights abuses during the civil-war era came to power; many of these same individuals had been deeply involved with the opium trade prior to Taliban rule. Thus, the opium trade was revived as the international community backed former warlords into power. As the trade spread, the Taliban also began to exploit its production in areas under its control.

By the end of 2014, Afghanistan cultivated 224,000 hectares of poppy crops, producing more than 6400 tons of opium: the largest opium harvest in Afghanistan’s history. Despite thirteen years of international engagement in the country, production continues to rise each year, as the yearly harvest employs more than 411,000 Afghans, more than the entire Afghan National Security Forces. As a result, Afghanistan now produces over 90 percent of the world's illicit opiates, as the opium trade constitutes increasing levels of the country’s GDP. In the Rolling Stone, Mathieu Aikins chronicles how in the pursuit of the War on Terror, the West lost the War on Drugs in Afghanistan, “by allying with many of the same people who turned the country into the world's biggest source of heroin.” Yet, a comprehensive strategy to deal with the drug trade in Afghanistan has yet to emerge as international forces withdraw and the strategies employed to date by various NATO states have proven themselves to be largely ineffective, uncoordinated and occasionally counter-productive. Many military shortcomings during Canada and NATO’s mission in Afghanistan can be partly attributed to their inability to address the growth of the illicit trade in a constructive manner. Ground eradication reinforced corruption and resentment among locals, as poor farmers suffered the greatest loss of livelihoods, while richer farmers could preserve their crops through bribery. This created resentment among Afghans who saw their crops as unfairly targeted. On the other hand, aerial eradication united all farmers against the government, generated support for the Taliban, and posed an immense threat to stability and security.

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131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
Although the Taliban cut down poppy production levels to record lows in 2001\(^{137}\), production has skyrocketed since because the crop has become lucrative not only for Taliban insurgents, but also for Afghan government officials. The Taliban forced many farmers to convert their crops to poppy in order to increase revenue and detach locals from the legal economy, thereby weakening the Afghan government.\(^{138}\) However, corrupt Afghan government officials were equally as culpable of exploiting the trade for personal profit; smuggling is deeply intertwined with all levels of the government.\(^{139}\) The narcotics trade has infiltrated even the uppermost levels of government in Afghanistan; President Karzai’s own brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, and his followers greatly profited from the opium trade. Incredibly, in 2007 President Karzai appointed Izzatullah Wasifi, a convicted heroin trafficker, as Afghanistan's anticorruption chief.\(^{140}\) The World Bank warned of the vicious cycle of mutually reinforcing problems caused by the linkages between drugs, warlords, and insecurity\(^ {141}\) but the issue remained unresolved.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to prescribe solutions to the drug trade in Afghanistan, but it is an issue that needs to be made a priority. All options should be examined and scrutinized in order to begin addressing this issue, including contentious ones, such as incorporating the Afghan poppy growers into the legitimate industry for making morphine for medical purposes to address global shortages, as opposed to making opium for the drug trade. If the Taliban use opium crops to disconnect civilians from the formal economy and government, it is worth considering ways to reincorporate them back into the formal economy while boosting the economy, before transitioning to more traditional crops when the option is made feasible.

NATO AND ISAF

Flaws in mission design and implementation led to the gravest errors during Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan. However, there were also logistical barriers that prevented optimal functioning and coordination during the mission. Obstacles became apparent when NATO member states were unable to follow through with commitments of troops and equipment. For example, in the first six months of 2004, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the new NATO secretary-general, could not find three helicopters to send to Kabul.\(^{142}\) There were also significant ISAF inefficiencies, such as the frequent rotation of ISAF commanders at Kabul headquarters and regional commands, which reflected a lack of strategic direction.\(^{143}\) Moreover, there were issues with NATO rotations that placed a great strain on the Canadian military, which was engaged in Afghanistan for over a decade straight.\(^ {144}\) Lastly, the routine denial of visas for Afghan interpreters that worked with Canadian and US forces is a legacy that will have resounding consequences\(^ {145}\) for the reputation of NATO in future missions abroad and will have a negative effect on the credibility of the institution.

\(^{137}\) Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*: 206.
\(^{138}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 217
\(^{139}\) Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 225
\(^{141}\) Rashid, *Descent among Warlords*: 205.
\(^{142}\) Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*: 324.
\(^{143}\) Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*: 352.
\(^{145}\) William “Bill” Graham, Interview: Canada in Afghanistan.
\(^{146}\) William “Bill” Graham, Interview: Canada in Afghanistan.
The Detainee Issue

When the detainee scandal broke out, Canadians were shocked to learn that their own troops may have been complicit in war crimes in contravention of international law by handing over detainees to Afghan custody, where they knew they would likely be tortured. Afghan authorities are known for their mistreatment of detainees, and the US State Department published reports that documented the use of torture and abuse techniques that included, “pulling out fingernails and toenails, burning with hot oil, beatings, sexual humiliation, and sodomy.”\(^{146}\) Canadian troops were cognizant of this and still handed over detainees to Afghan authorities. NATO failed to act proactively on this issue and Bill Graham emphasized, "the detainee issue was very important because it affected the legitimacy of the mission."\(^{147}\)

Janice Stein and Eugene Lang point out in *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, “Ottawa could not explain convincingly why the Canadian Forces did not set up their own detention facilities in Afghanistan.”\(^{148}\) However, this was not just Canada’s responsibility. The deputy chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Ahmad Fahim Hakim, argued that protecting detainees from abuse “is a collective problem that all NATO members share.”\(^{149}\) In retrospect, Graham believes that NATO should have taken charge and assigned a NATO member country to be in charge of detainees.\(^{150}\) The detainee issue reflected deficiencies in NATO coordination, which ended up damaging the legitimacy of the mission.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

The Soviet experience reveals how the tide turned for the mujahideen during the Afghan-Soviet war from 1979-1989. When the Soviet forces began using close air strikes to repel attacks, they inflicted severe civilian casualties, killing many women and children in the process. The killing of innocent civilians in the villages "violated the most important norms of the Pashtun code of honour and infuriated tribal leaders."\(^{151}\) This angered the local population to the point that local tribal leaders put aside their historical rivalries in order to expel the foreign occupying army. They succeeded by internationalizing their struggle and receiving assistance from a variety of foreign countries. In particular, Pakistan's Intelligence Services (ISI) exploited the porous border in order to train thousands of fighters, local and foreign, to fight the Soviet enemy. Iran, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries funded and supported the jihad.\(^{152}\) The same trend can be observed during NATO's mission in Afghanistan. Thus, it was imperative that Canada and NATO not be viewed as an occupying force to avoid a similar fate.

Graeme Smith remarked in retrospect that the cycles of increased counter-insurgency and increased violence were discernable and should have been viewed as a bellwether for future combat.\(^{153}\) Part of this increase in violence during the counter-insurgency can be attributed to the fact that differentiating ordinary Pashtuns/civilians from the Taliban was exceedingly difficult since combatants were not visibly distinguishable from civilians. However, a Pakistani refugee who fled the Taliban in the tribal regions of Pakistan had a different take on the trend. When

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146 Smith, *The Dogs Are Eating Them Now*: 129.
147 William “Bill” Graham, Interview: Canada in Afghanistan.
148 Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 247.
149 Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 257.
150 William “Bill” Graham, Interview: Canada in Afghanistan.
152 Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War*: 27.
153 Graeme Smith, Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada's mission in Afghanistan.
asked about the increasing civilian deaths, he noted that this was a fact actively exploited by the Taliban in order to incite anger over civilian deaths and recruit more Afghans to their cause.154

Taliban members would deliberately conceal themselves within populated areas and local villages, knowing that NATO would target these same villages through air strikes or night raids. NATO members would repeatedly play into this tactic and attack villages in search of “Taliban insurgents” or “militants”, causing significant civilian deaths. They may have successfully killed a handful of insurgents, but they also lost the “hearts and minds” of the same village by killing civilians in the process. Entire communities would become aggravated and seek revenge; here, the Taliban would find new recruits, now fervently anti-NATO and anti-government. This would play out repeatedly over the next few years, creating a persistent stream of support for the Taliban, while NATO member states called for increased troop commitments caused by these influxes, thus propelling this cycle further. In the last six months of 2006 alone, NATO launched more air strikes, largely in the south, than it had in the previous three years. They inflicted numerous civilian casualties, created more than eighty thousand internally displaced people who fled the bombing, and antagonized the local population who saw no difference between the Taliban and ISAF bombs.155

To understand what is currently happening in Afghanistan, one must be cognizant of Afghanistan's history and more particularly, the West's previous engagement with the country. Lingering memories may be inflaming current conditions because the years before 2001 are still imprinted in the memories of the Afghan people. Chris Sands points this out succinctly: "The Taliban first rose up in 1994, when Afghanistan was controlled by warlords still high from the CIA support they had been receiving a few years earlier. A similar thing was happening again, and the movement's original members were quick to see that." The warlord and government corruption needs to be curbed if Taliban support is to decrease.

Ultimately, the battle with the Taliban will have to be ended through political means, not military ones. As Graeme Smith pointed out (and numerous other policy-makers, scholars and journalists have echoed) is that “neither side of this war is going to win through force of arms”156. It is clear the Taliban is not going to be eradicated as their strength continues to grow each year—their presence in Afghanistan in the future is a given. David Mulroney believes the objective is not to hand over part of southern Afghanistan to the Taliban, but to instead create the conditions that would allow some members of the Taliban to come in from the cold and be a part of a new Afghanistan, by accepting the Afghan constitution and the rule of law that is a part of the new Afghanistan.157 However, this has proven to be exceedingly difficult, because by intensifying their violence, the Taliban appear to be signaling that they see progress on the battlefields and not at the bargaining table. Peace talks must be mediated by a neutral third-party, ensure international recognition of Afghan neutrality, devolve more power to the provinces, involve all Afghan stakeholders (including resistance groups) and include the governments of all neighbouring states.158

During foreign correspondent Jonathan Steele's interview with Mikhail Gorbachev in 2011, he asked, what lessons should the West learn from the Soviet experience? Should they talk to the Taliban? To which Gorbachev replied,

155 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 215.
156 Graeme Smith, Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada’s mission in Afghanistan.
157 David Mulroney, Interview: Canada and China in Afghanistan.
158 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 149.
They should talk to everyone. We [USSR] talked to everyone, including the people fighting against us… I say withdraw the troops. Help the Afghans create a political situation that would be more democratic and make it possible to shape some kind of a government, a central government and provincial governments, taking into account tribal allegiances because without taking that into account, success is impossible. Support the business community, religious leaders… Then work out some arrangement and start pulling out and put an end to this epic story... The lesson today is clear. This time there must be negotiations.”

Canada’s mission in Afghanistan may be officially over, but mistakes made during its 13-year commitment should be analyzed, rigorously studied and learned from. History illuminates numerous lessons pertaining to Afghanistan for both Canada and NATO, and the cost of failing to heed these lessons is immense. Graeme Smith succinctly describes the importance of learning lessons from the mission in Afghanistan when asked about Afghanistan’s future: “There is a big difference between a bad situation and a really bad situation… It’s probably going to continue getting worse, but the question of how worse is not a small question. I think that is actually a very important question.”

CONCLUSION
From a military perspective, the mission in Kandahar and Afghanistan was a success: it increased the Canadian military’s international visibility, profile, and credibility with its NATO allies. However, the truth of the matter is that this was not the mission’s objective; the objective was to promote good governance and achieve stability in Afghanistan. Although it was a success for the military, the mission did not meet the goals outlined in the Manley Panel and failed to stabilize Kandahar. The multitude of factors that account for this shortcoming have been outlined in this paper and examined through both the Afghan and Canadian lens.

Although the Canadian Forces have undergone a radical transformation as a result of the Afghan war, the government and people of Canada still need to ask whether these changes made Canadians any safer or better respected; whether they have increased Canada’s international political clout; and whether these changes were effective in better accomplishing the goals set out in the Manley Panel. The conclusions of all three questions are debatable. Canada may be more respected in military circles around the world, but some may argue that it has lost clout as a neutral, fair and peaceful nation around the world, which was its key to success in the Kabul portion of the Canadian mission. Canada has damaged its reputation as a champion of human rights through its complicity in the torture of detainees and its willingness to work with human rights abusers. In addition, the goals set out in the Manley Panel have not been met as a result of the transformation, particularly those surrounding security and stability. Afghanistan was Canada’s first real test of the 3D policy combining defense, development and diplomacy and there is considerable room for improvement.

Lastly, Afghanistan had tested whether NATO could remain relevant in addressing the security challenges of this generation. The results are mixed; while it is too early to judge the long-term effectiveness of the mission, NATO and Canada’s military can still learn from the lessons gathered so far. In future missions, Canada should seek to better understand the geopolitical, historical, and ethnic factors involved in any particular region, when employing

159 Steele, Ghosts of Afghanistan: 395.
160 Graeme Smith, Interview: Lessons Learned from Canada’s mission in Afghanistan.
161 Stein and Lang, The Unexpected War: 19.
troops abroad. Furthermore, Canada should uphold the human rights standards, principles and values enshrined in its charter while overseas, while punching above its weight diplomatically by leveraging its unique position in the world as an influential power without a colonial or imperial history, in order to help enact sustainable solutions to the world’s conflicts.

Eugene Lang and Janice Stein conclude _The Unexpected War_ by highlighting what every Canadian should take away from the mission in Afghanistan: “Through Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, we now see ourselves more clearly. We hope Canadians will come with us on this journey as self-governing men and women who must decide where they want Canada to go in the future and what they want Canada to do in the world.”

Through lessons learned from Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan, Canada and NATO should be better able to navigate the scope and limitations of their roles within a rapidly changing global theatre. Better-informed strategies that are cognizant of the complex regional security complexes that exist worldwide will allow both NATO and Canada to better execute nation-building and counter-insurgency strategies in other contexts. As Mikhail Gorbachev’s poignant advice would suggest: the choice is between learning from history or facing the risk of becoming irrelevant.

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