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HOUSE AND SENATE COMMITTEES

Trenton Documents No Secret, Training Numbers

By Lee Berthiaume

Reservists represent about one-quarter of all Canadian military forces in Afghanistan, the Commons' National Defence committee heard. At the same time, the special Afghanistan committee heard that only about 10 per cent of all Canadian soldiers in the country are directly training Afghan security forces.

Meanwhile, the UN's refugee representative in Canada criticized the government for not establishing a refugee appeal division at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

And the deputy minister of defence said blueprints of a secret unit's future Trenton, Ont., base that were found in an Ottawa trash can were not secret.

Training Numbers are 'Mug's Game'

Roughly 10 per cent of soldiers are now engaged in fulltime training and mentoring of Afghan security forces, a Canadian general told the **Special Committee on Canada's Mission in Afghanistan** on June 4, prompting concern from opposition critics.

Lt.-Gen. **Michel Gauthier**, commander of all overseas Canadian military operations, said over the past 18 months, the number of personnel dedicated to training has increased from 15 to 220, while Canadian forces regularly conduct operations alongside Afghan units.

"That's obviously progress, but we've got 2,500 troops in theatre," Liberal deputy leader **Michael Ignatieff** said. "Am I right to infer that only 10 per cent of your effort is on training because that strikes me as surprisingly low, worryingly low? And then the question is are you going to scale it up?"

"With all due respect, sir, looking purely at numbers is a little bit of a mug's game," Lt.-Gen. Gauthier countered. "Of course, what's not reflected in the numbers is that most of those folks are leaders.... So intellectually, and from a leadership perspective, that investment is there."

In addition, the general said, Canadian forces conduct numerous operations with Afghans and offer support on communications and a number of other areas.

"I can assure you that we are already where you are suggesting we need to be, and we'll continue to move in that direction," he said.

Lt.-Gen. Gauthier refused, however, to provide guarantees Afghan security forces will be ready to take over in Kandahar by 2011.

"Unfortunately, my crystal ball is not terribly clear in this regard," he said. "Trying to forecast, predict where it might be specifically in 2011, I would rather not try."

"Will we see a progress in a functional sense with regard to the police, the ability of the army, the capacity for governance at village, district level, the level of provinces? Yes, once again we will see progress. To what extent? I could not tell you today."

CSR Roundtable Response

Opposition members of the **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development** passed a motion on June 3 recommending the government respond "in a reasonable time" to the results of a national roundtable on corporate social responsibility and the Canadian mining industry in developing countries.

"We're going on over 450 days. It was more than a year ago that the government said it would respond soon," said the motion's sponsor, NDP Foreign Affairs critic **Paul Dewar**. "I think Canadians want to know where this government stands on the report that was a ground breaking report on corporate social responsibility."

Deepak Obhrai, parliamentary secretary to the foreign affairs minister, said the government is working on the response but needed time to ensure it had analyzed the results of its

is working on the response but needed time to ensure it had analyzed the results of its actions.

"You have to look at all the recommendations, what impacts other laws, what impacts other situations, what impacts other government policies and what are the impacts on the government's direction," he said.

"[The government] may adopt a lot of recommendations that come forward, but it may not adopt certain recommendations over here."

Colombia Trade Deal Division

The controversial Canada-Colombia free trade negotiations were again at the centre of intense debate last week as various parties offered their opinions of a possible deal to the **Standing Committee on International Trade**.

On June 2, **Shirley-Ann George**, vice-president of international operations at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, voiced her organization's support for the deal. She warned that abandoning talks now would send the wrong message to other potential free trade partners.

"Now that we are seeking to negotiate and complete FTAs in a more timely fashion, we are having significant difficulties getting other countries to take us seriously and show interest in negotiating with us," she said. "Even some small countries are reluctant to engage. So we must not forget that how we approach the FTA with Colombia can have real consequences on our ability to negotiate FTAs with other larger partners, including, for example, the very important European Union."

That same day, the committee heard from **Luis Hernán Correa Miranda**, vice-president of the Unified Workers Confederation, a major union in Colombia.

Mr. Miranda said the union was convinced a free trade agreement would not help the union or average Colombians.

"The only ones who will benefit from that free trade agreement will be the multinational companies, in particular the U.S. companies," he said. "The employers are benefiting because the trade union movement is disappearing."

On June 4, **Gilles-Philippe Pagé** of Peace Brigades International said reports of extra-judicial killings of civilians is on the decline because Colombian security forces are hiding attacks by presenting dead civilians as FARC supporters.

"What is important to note here is that this situation gives the impression that the number of civilians killed or executed as a consequence of the conflict, is declining," he said. "But, in fact, the number is simply transferred to the number of guerilla members killed in combat."

Roger Falconer of the United Steelworkers, also opposed the agreement.

Mr. Falconer said other agreements, such as NAFTA and Canada's deals with Costa Rica and Chile have not "provided any enforceable legal mechanisms to pursue labour rights violations."

But **Leigh Cruess**, senior vice-president of Enbridge, and **Vladimir Torres**, trade and development project manager at the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), voiced their own support for the deal.

"We believe that Canada has the obligation to support the democratic government, and that the trade reasons are valid in and of themselves," Mr. Torres said, "but our concern for the well-being of Colombians and human rights in Colombia is definitely the most powerful argument for why we should indeed go ahead with this trade agreement."

Lack Culture of DND Secrecy

Security concerns surrounding a NORAD building in North Bay that were highlighted by Auditor General **Sheila Fraser** last year represented a potentially harmful approach to security by the Defence Department, the **Standing Committee on Public Accounts** heard on June 3.

Ms. Fraser said her office had four main security concerns about the building, including that blueprints were placed in the public domain so contractors could bid on them, that the construction site was not controlled, and workers did not have to pass security checks.

"Our audit showed that many of the problems we identified may have been avoided if the government security policy had been adhered to more strictly at the beginning of construction," she said.

Lt.-Gen. **Walter Natynczyk**, deputy chief of defence staff, acknowledged the problems but said a different culture of security existed in the 1990s, when construction started.

However, he acknowledged the concerns raised by the auditor general's report were a concern, especially since the building is to be used jointly by Canadian and American personnel.

"The auditor general's report is very accurate in the lack of judgment by people in handling this case," Lt.-Gen. Natynczyk said. "Again, it speaks to the culture where people have not understood the importance of security, especially in a facility of this importance to the security of Canada and also in our relationship with our American partners."

The committee also heard that Defence Department blueprints for projects in Trenton, Ont., found in an Ottawa trashcan were not actually secret.

"Those blueprints were deemed to be unclassified," said **Robert Fonberg**, Defence deputy minister. "Treasury Board, under the government security policy, now recognizes that there are no document handling requirements for unclassified blueprints."

RAD Unnecessary: Volpe

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Representative in Canada **Abraham Abraham** criticized the government before the **Senate Committee on Human Rights** on June 2 for failing to establish a refugee appeal division (RAD) at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

However, on June 3, former Immigration minister **Joe Volpe** and current Immigration Minister **Diane Finley** both defended their decisions not to implement the RAD.

Mr. Abraham said human beings can and do make mistakes, and that's why UNHCR is pushing for the elimination of single-member boards, which is what exists at the IRB.

"What we hoped would be avoided is actually what is occurring today," he said. "In the absence of a second-instance review based on merits of the case, Canada's refugee status determination system does not conform to international standards."

Mr. Abraham said so-called appeal mechanisms that currently exist—a pre-removal risk assessment; the Federal Court; and exemptions on compassionate and humanitarian grounds—are not true appeal mechanisms.

But Mr. Volpe, who served as immigration minister in 2005-2006, said he was never convinced an appeal division was necessary because the number of refugees being admitted increased year after year.

"From my perspective, as the person responsible for the administration of the department, I wanted to ensure, first, that we could eliminate a backlog," he said, "and, second, that we could always meet our international commitments, which was to ensure that we would have approximately 15 per cent of our immigration total be met by recognized refugee applicants."

Mr. Volpe said between 2001 and 2005, the number of refugees admitted rose from about 27,000 to 35,700, while there were only 32,000 in 2004.

"I saw the number of refugees landed increasing," he said. "I said, 'Under one category, there is no urgency to implement the RAD.'"

Mr. Volpe also disputed the importance of an appeal division.

"If their objectives were to make the system fairer, I would have to ask for a definition of fairness," he said.

"The RAD was a fifth. We could add a sixth or a seventh. However, if the answer is negative the first four times coming up, who are we talking about in terms of fairness? Are we talking about the person who filed in Beijing and has to wait forever because the target number for Beijing is considerably lower than the number who actually applied?"

Ms. Finley said experience has shown that many refugee claimants are not legitimate refugees.

"Unfortunately, experience has taught us that many refugee claimants are not legitimate

refugees," she said, adding the IRB has found about 43 per cent of asylum seekers really need protection.

"If implemented, the refugee appeal division...would serve as a de facto appeal mechanism for every single failed refugee claimant, regardless of whether or not they are indeed legitimate. The result would be that those who truly need our protection will have to wait even longer before being granted asylum in our country."

Australian Vets Well Served

The Australian government sets aside about \$11 billion to assist that country's 420,000 veterans, while Canada spends about \$3.5 billion for 221,000, despite having a much larger population, the **Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs** heard on June 3.

The Australian numbers were presented by **Adam Luckhurst** of the Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs during his appearance with High Commissioner **William Fisher**.

At the same time, the Australian department has 2,300 employees working with veterans as compared to 3,500 in the Canadian department, prompting concern from NDP Veterans' Affairs critic **Peter Stoffer**, who offered up the Canadian numbers.

"Something is not right here," Mr. Stoffer said. "Somebody is a lot more efficient.... You've got 12 million fewer people, four times the budget, 1,000 fewer people working, and more clients. We're going to have to look at this down the road. It's just unbelievable, the comparisons."

Mr. Luckhurst also explained a new group of programs the Australian department is developing to reach veterans better, which includes a dedicated website, a 24-hour hotline, an information book and resources for families and care givers.

"Some of our Internet-based activities mean that people, wherever they are, can get some support and assistance," he said.

Mr. Luckhurst also said that Australian veterans recently gave the department's efforts a 90 per cent approval rate.

Reservists Harder to Track

Reservists, including those who serve in Afghanistan and may be susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder, can be more difficult to track than regular soldiers, the **Standing Committee on National Defence** heard on June 5.

Maj.-Gen. **Dennis Tabbernor**, chief of reserves and cadets, said treatment for reserve soldiers is the same as regular force counterparts. However, because reservists don't serve overseas with their entire units they can have a different experience.

"However, there are those, both in the regular force and the reserves, who, when they get back from wherever they were, walk away from the military and disappear," he said, "and those we have trouble dealing with and three, four, five, ten years down the line, this individual will resurface with an issue."

Brig.-Gen. **Gary O'Brien**, director general of land reserve, said individual units are responsible for following up to ensure reservists receive proper treatment, though that can be difficult in rural areas.

Brig.-Gen. O'Brien added that there are currently 538 reservists with the 2,500-strong Canadian military task force in Kandahar province.

lee@embassymag.ca