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# Famed Van Doos won't be spared danger, new commander says

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**ILLUSTRATION:** Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche smiles yesterday at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. Laroche says troops from the famed Van Doos regiment won't get special treatment despite antiwar sentiment in their home province of Quebec. ;  
**DATELINE:** KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN  
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Soldiers from Quebec's famed Van Doo regiment won't get any special treatment to keep them out of harm's way in Afghanistan, says Canada's new military commander in the war-torn country.

With antiwar sentiment already running high in Quebec — a province in which the Conservatives need more seats to form a majority government — some observers believe the government does not want Quebec-based soldiers putting their lives at risk on the front lines.

But Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche said yesterday the Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doos, will face the same dangers that other Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have faced.

"Regardless of what is said in Canada, at a political level or on the street, the work goes on just as it has in the past," Laroche told a news conference at the official handover at Kandahar Airfield, a major base for Canadian and coalition troops in southern Afghanistan.

"You know, there's no more pressure on the Van Doos than the others. We get our orders from the chief of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, and our mandate is clear."

Laroche succeeds Tim Grant, who was promoted to major-general during the ceremony by Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Grant, a brigadier general until his promotion, was in command of Canadian troops in Afghanistan during the past nine months.

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of Canada's troops in Afghanistan will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

"What we're going to do, essentially, we'll carry on the good work that has been done," Laroche said.

He said the Van Doos' approach to the mission won't be any different.

"You may see a difference in six months or seven or eight — I don't know."

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said yesterday that Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured.

# Afghan war is an error

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**EDITION:** Final  
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**PAGE:** A10  
**BYLINE:** Abdelrahman Mahmoud  
**COPYRIGHT:** © 2007 Torstar Corporation  
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When I Googled "civilian casualties in Afghanistan," one of the headlines stated that the number of Afghan civilians killed by U.S. bombs in the first year of the war has surpassed the death toll of the 9/11 attacks.

So can any of those who support the troops in Afghanistan tell me how are we contributing to keeping the peace in Afghanistan?

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We have no legal right to be in Afghanistan.

In the eyes of regular Afghan people we are considered intruders, invaders, outsiders who came to occupy the land rather than to help.

And the reason that we are there is because the Taliban is a threat to Canadian security. Yah, absolutely right. You know what, we should send our troops to Nigeria too, they tend to have lots of strikes that apparently hike our gas prices here, and that is a serious threat to Canadian security.

The fact of the matter is, the Taliban is gaining more moral grounds and have more support from the average Afghan people who realize what NATO is all about.

Mark my words, and mark it clear: We will not defeat the Taliban no matter how many years politicians intend to keep our troops there, and no matter how "powerful" NATO might be, and we certainly shall not succeed in what the British and Soviets failed to do. We shall only share their same defeat.

Abdelrahman Mahmoud

Cambridge

# Conservatives need to change public-opinion tactics

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**BYLINE:** JAMES TRAVERS  
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Shooting the messenger is a feel-good reflex that does nothing to fix the problem. Except when the messenger muddles the message so often confusion becomes the problem.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper is in Prime Edward Island this week guiding caucus hands as they re-write a Conservative message voters aren't receiving clearly or well.

At precisely the moment when most federal minority governments are expiring, the ruling party is stagnant in public opinion and searching for momentum to lift it towards majority.

How that's to be done divides Conservatives. For some it's back to the basics of tax cuts, family values and a muscular military — issues the prime minister revisited in an evening stump-style speech. Others argue that fresh priorities coupled with an anticipated cabinet shuffle are required to revive a government now too old for its "new" branding.

Both have merit. One served the party well immediately after last year's election victory while the other shares its appeal with applying voltage to a flagging heart. Neither is a substitute for the stories this government can't believably tell.

Blame it in part on the controlling nature that surfaced here in a revealingly authoritarian confrontation over press freedom that turned potentially good news into more bad publicity. Blame it too on ideological certainty that Canadians will eventually accept superior Conservative wisdom if it's just repeated often enough.

Maybe, but to recruit more than one in three Canadians to their cause Conservatives must rediscover the power of frank explanation. Afghanistan and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor's latest effort to convince the country that he and his top general agree on the mission is just one of many instructive examples.

In morphing towards an exit strategy and away from the prime minister's promise not to "cut and run," Connor and Canadian Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier are sowing confusion over when the suspect Afghan army might be ready to replace Canadians now in harm's way.

Stretching the short spin-control leash held by the Prime Minister's Office, O'Connor offered a refreshingly articulate explanation that began shrinking the gaps.



Still, it's just another episode in a long-running serial. An administration that can't decide if it wants to be in Afghanistan to revenge 9/11, kill "scumbags" or build a model democracy is now struggling to explain how it will leave.

Inconsistency is a Conservative communications constant. Strong policy or weak, this government can't figure out what it wants to say or how to say it persuasively.

The result is a necklace of millstones dragging the prime minister down.

Here in Atlantic Canada a sound Conservative repair to the equalization system Liberals broke is, thanks to a precipitous campaign promise, making the prime minister and his party pariahs. Across the country the party is losing arguments on income trusts, the environment and, most of all, the war.

Sometimes substance is the problem. Sometimes the audience refuses to suspend suspicion.

Of the two, the second is most damaging.

As former premier Mike Harris demonstrated twice in Ontario, voters will give majorities to parties that tell a straight story even when its appeal is limited.

But as Harper must now know, voters don't give the benefit of the doubt to ones that mumble even as they equivocate.

Whatever strategy Conservatives choose here, their tactics will have to change this fall if they are to regain public confidence.

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James Travers covers national issues.

# Army denies rescue in works for Koreans; Another deadline passes for hostages captured by Taliban in Afghanistan

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The Afghan army dropped leaflets yesterday warning of impending military action in the region where Taliban militants are holding 21 South Korean hostages, though the army said the operation is not connected to the captives.

Another deadline passed at noon with no word that any of the hostages had been killed, while the local governor said the Taliban militants had agreed to a face-to-face meeting requested by South Korea's ambassador. Two hostages have already been killed, though several deadlines have passed with no killings.

In Ghazni province, where 23 South Koreans were kidnapped on July 19 while driving from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar, Afghan soldiers in helicopters dropped leaflets telling citizens to move to government-controlled areas in order to avoid upcoming military action.

Defence Ministry spokesperson Gen. Zahir Azimi said the mission, the start of which could be days or weeks away, had been long-planned and had no connection to the Korean kidnapping case. But a show of military force in the region could place the kidnappers under further pressure.

Gov. Marajudin Pathan said the Taliban agreed to a face-to-face meeting with Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, and officials were looking for suitable location to hold it. Pathan said he did not know when the meeting would happen. He also said another high-ranking official had arrived from South Korea to take part in talks, though he did not know the official's name or position.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban militants, told The Associated Press after the noon deadline passed that the remaining 21 hostages were still alive, though two female captives were gravely ill and could die at any time.

He reiterated that the militants still wanted their key demand met: the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for the lives of the Koreans.

A doctor who heads a private clinic said Afghan doctors will try to visit the hostages tomorrow and take medicine to them. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Wahwaj said he did not have permission from the militants and did not know if the attempt would be successful.

Ahmadi said Mullah Omar, the Taliban's elusive leader whose whereabouts is unknown, appointed three members of the Taliban's high council to oversee the hostage situation and they have the power to order them killed at any time.

The South Koreans, who are all Christians from the same church, are the largest group of foreign hostages taken in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.- led invasion that drove the Taliban from power.

Human Rights Watch called for the immediate release of all remaining captives. The New York-based group said the Taliban have kidnapped at least 41 Afghan civilians so far this year and killed at least 23 of them. The rest remain missing. "The taking of hostages is a war crime," Joanne Mariner of Human Rights Watch said in a statement. South Korea said it would send a delegation to the United States to seek co-operation to resolve the crisis, and the hostages' relatives pleaded with U.S. Embassy officials during a visit for help negotiating their loved ones' release.

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# Memorial placed in honour of fallen soldier

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**SOURCE:** Transcontinental Media; The Gulf News  
**BYLINE:** Mandy Ryan  
**DATELINE:** Port aux Basques  
Gale, Stephen and Maureen Gillam pose for cameras while placing a granite memorial  
**ILLUSTRATION:** honouring the late Sgt. Craig Gillam at the top of Mark Rock. – Photo by Mandy Ryan/The Gulf News  
**WORD COUNT:** 464

---

Sitting at the top of Mark Rock Hill near South Branch is a carefully placed memorial for the late Sgt. Craig Gillam.

It was a hard, hot hike to the top of Mark Rock Trail, but the purpose of the trek made it easier for the 41 family and friends who participated.

Gillam, a 20-year veteran of the Canadian Forces, was one of two soldiers killed in an attack by the Taliban in Afghanistan last October.

His wife Maureen, daughter Gale and son Stephen – all home from Oromocto, N.B. – climbed the hill last week along with the others, leaving the Trans-Canada Highway at just after 11 a.m. and reaching Mark Rock about an hour and a half later.

The idea to memorialize Gillam in this way developed over the past couple of months, said Stephen. He couldn't remember who came up with the idea, but the reason was easily explained: Gillam made the two-kilometre climb every summer during his annual visit home. It was one of his favourite things to do.

Mark Rock was also the last thing he saw of Newfoundland and his hometown. He was excited to tell his family by telephone that he could see Mark Rock from the air the last time he flew over the province Sept. 1, 2006.

The hike was warm and sunny. All participants were given yellow ribbons to tie onto the trees lining the trail that leads to Mark Rock. Hikers also shared the responsibility of getting several five-pound bags of smaller white rocks, on which the memorial now sits, from an ATV that was parked at the halfway point, to the top of the mountain. The 50-pound memorial was taken up earlier that day by some of Gillam's male family members and friends.

Participants breathed a sigh of relief once at the top of the mountain, and some appeared surprised and pleased with themselves for having accomplished the challenging hike.

Tired hikers joked about how they could feel their hearts beating out of their chest at the last, and steepest, section of the trail. Others waved to Rita Gillam who was said to be watching from the Gillam home in South Branch where Craig was raised.

Maureen Gillam fondly remembered her late husband choosing a more difficult, and steeper, route for them to

descend the mountain the first time he took her to Mark Rock many years ago.

Everyone signed a notebook so the family would remember who took part in the special day.

Stephen Gillam chose a place on the grass not far from Mark Rock that he felt was right for his father's memorial. Others emptied the bags of white rocks to prepare a foundation for the granite memorial. Then Stephen, along with his mother and sister, placed the stone.

Many photos were taken of this special moment and Maureen Gillam expressed her thanks and appreciation for those who participated in the hike.

There was no ceremony, no sad words – just shared memories of Craig and the acknowledgement by many that he would be proud to be remembered in this way.

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The hike was warm and sunny. All participants were given yellow ribbons to tie onto the trees lining the trail that leads to Mark Rock. Hikers also shared the responsibility of getting several five-pound bags of smaller white rocks, on which the memorial now sits, from an ATV that was parked at the halfway point, to the top of the mountain. The 50-pound memorial was taken up earlier that day by some of Gillam's male family members and friends.

Participants breathed a sigh of relief once at the top of the mountain, and some appeared surprised and pleased with themselves for having accomplished the challenging hike.

Tired hikers joked about how they could feel their hearts beating out of their chest at the last, and steepest, section of the trail. Others waved to Rita Gillam who was said to be watching from the Gillam home in South Branch where Craig was raised.

Maureen Gillam fondly remembered her late husband choosing a more difficult, and steeper, route for them to

descend the mountain the first time he took her to Mark Rock many years ago.

Everyone signed a notebook so the family would remember who took part in the special day.

Stephen Gillam chose a place on the grass not far from Mark Rock that he felt was right for his father's memorial. Others emptied the bags of white rocks to prepare a foundation for the granite memorial. Then Stephen, along with his mother and sister, placed the stone.

Many photos were taken of this special moment and Maureen Gillam expressed her thanks and appreciation for those who participated in the hike.

There was no ceremony, no sad words – just shared memories of Craig and the acknowledgement by many that he would be proud to be remembered in this way.

# The work goes on | new commander; Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche says anti-war sentiment in home province won't keep Van Doos from front lines

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# Soldier jailed for refusing to report for duty; Master Corporal stayed in bed during attack on base in Kandahar

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In the event of an attack, he was supposed to act as a stretcher-bearer and be part of the reserve force.

"You were aware there was an increased threat to the forward operating base and that the base was particularly vulnerable at that time because a large number of soldiers were absent from the base," Perron said.

Armed insurgents attacked the camp at 2 a.m.

One of the attackers tried to fire a rocket-propelled grenade at one of the base's guard towers from about 50 metres away.

"The stand-to siren (warning soldiers to prepare to defend their position) and small-arms fire could be heard throughout the camp," Perron said.

"A guard returned fire and a patrol was dispatched to find the attackers. The stand-to lasted approximately one hour to 1 1/2 hours.

"At the start of the stand-to, other members of your living area urged you to get out of bed and tried to make you react appropriately to the alarm."

According to a statement of facts filed in the case, a corporal was donning his fighting gear when Billard tried to discourage him by saying: "Where are you going and what for? You are a ... flincher."

Other soldiers began urging Billard to get out of bed, and he said: "You're all just flinchers."

"You don't have to get dressed. You're just ... flinching."

When two of his comrades tried to roust Billard by banging a locker loudly with a plastic tube, he replied: "I'm immune to that. I'm going to sleep."

Billard did get out of bed at one point, "pulled on a pair of shorts, grabbed his pistol" and left his sleeping quarters to use the latrine.

"He returned and climbed back into bed," court documents say. "The stand-to ended a short time later."

The court martial judge said the soldier's conduct was "reprehensible" that day.

"It surely is not the conduct we expect of Canadian non-commissioned officers. Your duty is to follow orders and to ensure the welfare and discipline of your subordinates. You failed this duty miserably."

The 33-year-old soldier was born in York, Ont., and joined the army in St. John's.

Billard pleaded guilty to the military charge of "neglect to the prejudice of good order and discipline."

The prosecution withdrew another charge that "when ordered to carry out an operation of war (he) failed to use his utmost exertion to carry the orders into effect."

The judge's oral decision was delivered on July 6, just two days after six Canadian soldiers and a civilian Afghan interpreter died when the RG-31 Nyala patrol vehicle they were travelling in struck a bomb on a gravel road southwest of Kandahar.

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"This offence was committed in a theatre of operations in which combat and the threat from the enemy is an intricate part of daily life. The recent loss of six Canadian soldiers is a stark reminder of this fact.

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"We are trained to perform our duties and are expected to execute those duties to the best of our abilities. We must also trust our comrades-in-arms to be up to the task to ensure mission success and ensure the safety of our troops. "

Billard monitored his radio throughout the incident to keep himself apprised of the tactical situation, court documents say.

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# O'Connor nixes claim of rift with top general over Afghan mission

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O'Connor, in Charlottetown for a summer strategy meeting of the Conservative caucus, has been under fire recently for appearing to be at odds with his chief of defence staff

on the Afghanistan mission's timetable.

O'Connor insisted there is "not an iota" of difference between himself and Gen. Rick Hillier on the future of the mission — nor with any of the individual Canadian military commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

"As I've said, and as General Hillier has said, and as General Grant has said, and General Gauthier has said, what we're trying to do in the natural flow of things . . . is that we are shifting now to more operational training of the Afghan army."

Two weeks ago, O'Connor suggested Canadian troops would "basically be in reserve" by the end of the current six-month rotation of Van Doos, an assertion quickly contradicted by Hillier, among others, who said adequate training of Afghan soldiers will take much longer.

O'Connor clarified his remarks Wednesday to emphasize that a training role for Canadian troops is not a holiday and will consume the remaining 18 months of

Canada's current military commitment.

"These people go out with the Afghan army, they fight with the Afghan army," he said, noting the recent death of a Canadian soldier on one of the so-called OMLTs, or Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams.

"So it's a very dangerous mission," said O'Connor.

"We're not doing it to reduce casualties. I mean, we try everything to reduce casualties . . . but training the Afghan army has nothing to do with reducing casualties. It has to do with the idea that eventually they take

over responsibility for their own country."

He called training Afghan security forces, both army and police, "ultimately the exit strategy for all of NATO."

And he maintained that with Afghanistan roughly halfway towards its goal of having a 70,000-man army by 2010, foreign military intervention is not indefinite.

"It may be a long aid mission, or it may be a long diplomacy or police mission. I don't know," said O'Connor. "But it's not a long military mission."

The minister also said Wednesday that Canada has not been asked by the United Nations to provide combat troops to the Darfur region in Sudan.

Given Canada's 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, any such request would likely prove problematic.

"When you rotate 2,500 soldiers, that means you tie up many times that number," said O'Connor.

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# Defence Department is protecting soldiers

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**PUBLICATION:** Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

**DATE:** 2007.08.02

**SECTION:** Forum

**PAGE:** 5

**COLUMN:** In a few words

**WORD COUNT:** 156

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DND has every right to protect soldiers, while the NDP and the Liberals are playing the public for political points.

This lack of concern for Canadian citizens who serve our country is irresponsible. The NDP and Liberals are either ill–informed or chose to ignore a terrorist plot that was discovered in the United Kingdom in February. Nine suspects were arrested. Some of them planned to abduct and behead a young British Muslim soldier recently returned from Afghanistan. The video recording of his death was to be posted on the Internet.

Weakening security for our soldiers and possibly shifting the risk to their immediate family is not a smart move. It only demonstrates how low the opposition parties will go, even if it means jeopardizing the lives of military personnel and their family members.

Gary Hayes

Kingston

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**SECTION:** National/World

**PAGE:** B1

**COLUMN:** In brief

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**PUBLICATION:** The Guardian (Charlottetown)

**DATE:** 2007.08.02

**SECTION:** World

**PAGE:** B8

**SOURCE:** CP

**DATELINE:** KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

**ILLUSTRATION:** Brigadier-General Guy Laroche signs a document on Wednesday at the Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Laroche says troops from the famed Van Doos regiment won't get special treatment. Canadian Press photo

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"You know, there's no more pressure on the Van Doos than the others. We get our orders from the chief of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, and our mandate is clear."

Laroche succeeds Tim Grant, who was promoted to major-general during the ceremony by Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

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# The benefit of a plain-speaking Hillier

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**PUBLICATION:** The Guardian (Charlottetown)

**DATE:** 2007.08.02

**SECTION:** Opinion

**PAGE:** A7

**SOURCE:** Edmonton Journal

**ILLUSTRATION:** Hillier

**WORD COUNT:** 227

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**DATE:** 2007.08.02

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**COLUMN:** National Affairs

**BYLINE:** Travers, James

**DATELINE:** Ottawa

**WORD COUNT:** 551

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Instead, this prime minister and his party are looking for answers to a perplexing question. Exactly what will push them through the trust barrier blocking growth?

Heaven knows Harper is trying everything. He's appealed to patriotism in the Arctic as well as Afghanistan, applied the poultice of federal defence dollars to regional wounds and polished a statesman's image even as he deflects foreign policy attention from Asia and Africa to Latin America and the hemisphere. List, too, the March election budget bonanza and the relentless hammering of the old government by the no longer new and what emerges is an ideologically different prime minister relying on familiar tactics. Except they're not working – at least not yet.

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All were predictable. An obsessively controlling administration designed to self-destruct around the 18-month life expectancy of federal minorities is poorly suited to longevity. And mounting casualties were certain to erode support for an ill-defined mission Harper first explained with words too obviously borrowed



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Past performance and future prospects intersect this week in the dollhouse capital Anne of Green Gables made an international destination. Halfway through a successful summer, Harper needs to reassure his party he has a plan to free them from opinion poll stasis.

Its constituent parts are a refreshed agenda and a revised Afghanistan position that creates enough political space for new priorities to thrive. One demands the room to manoeuvre that an expected late fall return of Parliament would provide, the other a cabinet shuffle to ease out an embarrassing defence minister increasingly at public odds with his top general.

Having missed the election off-ramp, the prime minister must calm Canadians about the ultimate destination and convince Conservatives they are still on route.

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**DATE:** 2007.08.02

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**PAGE:** A6

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Colman O'Hare tried to tell us Iraq and Afghanistan are in Asia Minor (they're not), so we must not try to fix the mess there, even though we've been involved in his 'Asia Minor' since the 1960s. Kathleen O'Hara is concerned that the FBI hasn't laid charges against bin Laden in relation to 9/11, the relevance of which I fail to see considering that the FBI didn't lay charges against Emperor Hirohito after Pearl Harbor. There is a fundamental difference between a crime and an act of war. FDR and George W. Bush understood this. I also find it interesting that the left is constantly calling for 'debate' on policies they dislike (Afghanistan), but tolerate none on issues they hold dear (global warming).

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**SOURCE:** CP

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# SKorean hostage families plead with US Embassy for help in Afghan standoff

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 516

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) \_ Relatives of 21 South Koreans being held in Afghanistan made an emotional appeal to U.S. Embassy officials Wednesday for help in negotiating their release after two weeks as Taliban hostages.

Family members visited the embassy for about an hour and were told their message would be passed along to Washington.

“We will hold on to any small hope to save them,” Ryu Haeng-sik, 36, husband of hostage Kim Yoon-yong, 35, told The Associated Press outside the embassy in central Seoul, his eyes red from weeping and fatigue.

“We cannot say we're relieved, but there is no other way but to believe their words, that they're going to do their best,” he said.

Both the families and the South Korean government have insisted that previous international practice in dealing with abductions be set aside in the interest of human life \_ effectively asking the United States to make an exception to its policy of refusing to make concessions to terrorist demands.

But the United States and other countries strongly criticized Afghanistan earlier this year when it released five Taliban prisoners to win the freedom of an Italian journalist held hostage.

The South Korean president's office said Wednesday that Washington was giving basic co-operation on the standoff.

“We understand their dilemma and limits,” presidential spokesman Cheon Ho-sun said.

“There are some views that the United States holds everything. But that's a lot different from the fact,” he said.

The families have grown increasingly desperate after the Taliban killed two hostages and threatened to shoot more by a Wednesday deadline if their demand to release insurgent prisoners is not met.

The captive group of South Korean volunteers travelled in a church group to Afghanistan's dangerous south against the advice of the Foreign Ministry and were seized from their bus July while 19 en route from the Afghan capital, Kabul, to the city of Kandahar.

Also Wednesday, some 100 protesters \_ from anti-American activist and student groups \_ shouted slogans outside the U.S. Embassy, with about a dozen wearing white masks painted with tears of blood.

Some carried banners reading, “Bush: Don't kill, negotiate” or “Bush, you have responsibility.”

Other signs had a U.S. flag being smashed by a fist and called for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Hundreds of police in riot gear surrounded the demonstrators, bolstering the already large law enforcement

presence at the embassy.

U.S. President George W. Bush ``has a responsibility to intervene and negotiate with the Taliban," said activist Oh Hye-ran. The group handed a petition to embassy officials with a similar plea.

Outrage over the latest killing has sparked increasing calls in South Korea that it send its own troops to punish the Taliban and rescue the remaining captives, with comments on Web message boards calling for military action.

South Korea's presidential office said Tuesday it will not just ``sit by and watch" if the Taliban kills more captives, prompting speculation that a military option might be on the table.

But the spokesman Cheon reiterated Wednesday that Seoul was unchanged in its opposition to a military operation to end the crisis. The families of the remaining hostages have also voiced strong opposition to using force out of fears it would lead to mass deaths.

``There is no reason or need to give up on dialogue at this point," Cheon said, despite the looming deadline. ``There won't be any military operations without our consent."

South Korea has some 200 troops deployed in Afghanistan on a non-combat reconstruction mission.

# O'Connor denies rift with his top general over Afghan mission

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 466

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CHARLOTTETOWN (CP) \_ Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured on the front lines, Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said Wednesday.

O'Connor, in Charlottetown for a summer strategy meeting of the Conservative caucus, has been under fire recently for appearing to be at odds with his chief of defence staff on the Afghanistan mission's timetable.

O'Connor insisted there is "not an iota" of difference between himself and Gen. Rick Hillier on the future of the mission \_ nor with any of the individual Canadian military commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

"As I've said, and as General Hillier has said, and as General Grant has said, and General Gauthier has said, what we're trying to do in the natural flow of things . . . is that we are shifting now to more operational training of the Afghan army."

Two weeks ago, O'Connor suggested Canadian troops would "basically be in reserve" by the end of the current six-month rotation of Van Doos, an assertion quickly contradicted by Hillier, among others, who said adequate training of Afghan soldiers will take much longer.

O'Connor clarified his remarks Wednesday to emphasize that a training role for Canadian troops is not a holiday and will consume the remaining 18 months of Canada's current military commitment.

"These people go out with the Afghan army, they fight with the Afghan army," he said, noting the recent death of a Canadian soldier on one of the so-called OMLTs, or Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams.

"So it's a very dangerous mission," said O'Connor.

"We're not doing it to reduce casualties. I mean, we try everything to reduce casualties . . . but training the Afghan army has nothing to do with reducing casualties. It has to do with the idea that eventually they take over responsibility for their own country."

He called training Afghan security forces, both army and police, "ultimately the exit strategy for all of NATO."

And he maintained that with Afghanistan roughly halfway toward its goal of having a 70,000-man army by 2010, foreign military intervention is not indefinite.

"It may be a long aid mission, or it may be a long diplomacy or police mission. I don't know," said O'Connor. "But it's not a long military mission."

The minister also said Wednesday that Canada has not been asked by the United Nations to provide combat troops to the Darfur region in Sudan.

Given Canada's 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, any such request would likely prove problematic.

“When you rotate 2,500 soldiers, that means you tie up many times that number . . .” said O'Connor.

“We have to wait to see if we're asked at all, and my guess \_ I could be wrong \_ is that they won't ask us for combat troops or anything like that. They'll ask us for support or maybe finances or equipment or whatever.”

O'Connor said African or Asian soldiers are more likely candidates for service in Darfur.

“There's no end of troops available from Africa and Asia,” he said. “Some of these other countries have large conscript armies where they can provide large numbers of troops.”

# Afghan army readies military mission in area where S.Korean hostages held

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 795

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GHAZNI, Afghanistan (AP) \_ The Afghan army dropped leaflets Wednesday warning of impending military action in the region where Taliban militants are holding 21 South Korean hostages, though the army said the operation is not connected to the captives.

Another deadline passed at noon with no word that any of the hostages had been killed, while the local governor said the Taliban militants had agreed to a face-to-face meeting requested by South Korea's ambassador. Two hostages have already been killed, though several deadlines have passed with no killings.

In Ghazni province, where 23 South Koreans were kidnapped on July 19 while driving from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar, Afghan soldiers in helicopters dropped leaflets telling citizens to move to government-controlled areas in order to avoid upcoming military action.

Defence Ministry spokesman Gen. Zahir Azimi said the mission, the start of which could be days or weeks away, had been long-planned and had no connection to the Korean kidnapping case. But a show of military force in the region could place the kidnappers under further pressure.

Gov. Marajudin Pathan said the Taliban agreed to a face-to-face meeting with Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, and officials were looking for suitable location to hold it. Pathan said he did not know when the meeting would happen. He also said another high-ranking official had arrived from South Korea to take part in talks, though he did not know the official's name or position.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban militants, told The Associated Press after the noon deadline passed that the remaining 21 hostages were still alive, though two female captives were gravely ill and could die at any time.

He reiterated that the militants still wanted their key demand met: the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for the lives of the Koreans.

A doctor who heads a private clinic said Afghan doctors would try to visit the hostages Friday and take them medicine. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Wahwaj said he did not have permission from the militants and did not know if the attempt would be successful.

Ahmadi, the purported Taliban spokesman, said Mullah Omar, the Taliban's elusive leader whose whereabouts are unknown, appointed three members of the Taliban's high council to oversee the hostage situation and they have the power to order them killed at any time.

The South Koreans, who are all Christians from the same church, are the largest group of foreign hostages taken in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion that drove the Taliban from power.

Human Rights Watch called for the immediate release of all remaining captives. The New York-based group said the Taliban have kidnapped at least 41 Afghan civilians so far this year and killed at least 23 of them. The rest remain missing.

“The taking of hostages is a war crime,” Joanne Mariner of Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

South Korea said it would send a parliamentary delegation to the United States to seek co-operation in resolving the crisis, and relatives of the hostages pleaded with U.S. Embassy officials during an hour-long visit for help in negotiating their loved ones' release. The families were told their message would be passed on to Washington.

“We will hold on to any small hope to save them,” Ryu Haeng-sik, 36, whose wife Kim Yoon-yong, 35, is one of the hostages, told The Associated Press outside the embassy in Seoul, his eyes red from weeping and fatigue.

“We cannot say we're relieved, but there is no other way but to believe their words, that they're going to do their best,” he said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Tom Casey said: “It's a difficult situation and it's one we want resolved in the best way possible, which is unharmed and safe to their families.”

Both the families and the South Korean government have urged that previous international practice in dealing with abductions be set aside in the interest of human life, effectively asking the United States to make an exception to its policy of refusing to make concessions to terrorist demands.

But the United States and other countries strongly criticized Afghanistan earlier this year when it released five Taliban prisoners to win the freedom of a kidnapped Italian journalist.

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Meanwhile, in Ghazni's Dih Yak district, police recovered the bodies of four Afghan men, one of them a local judge who disappeared a week ago while travelling from neighbouring Paktia province, said Azizullah, a police official in Ghazni who goes by one name.

The police found the judge's ID card on his body. All four victims had bullet wounds, Azizullah said.

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# News organizations run with false report of rescue op; raising issue of risk

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE MEDIA  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 578

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``The error occurred because of a miscommunication between correspondents," Reuters spokesman Ty Trippet said. ``When it became clear that this was not the case, we immediately issued a worldwide advisory withdrawing the original story and making clear that it was wrong."

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# Quebec-based Van Doos won't be spared from danger in Afghanistan: commander

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 442

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP) \_ Soldiers from Quebec's famed Van Doo regiment won't get any special treatment to keep them out of harm's way in Afghanistan, says Canada's new military commander in the war-torn country.

With antiwar sentiment already running high in Quebec \_ a province in which the Conservatives need more seats to form a majority government \_ some observers believe the government does not want Quebec-based soldiers putting their lives at risk on the front lines.

But Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche said Wednesday the Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doos, will face the same dangers that other Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have faced,

"Regardless of what is said in Canada, at a political level or on the street, the work goes on just as it has in the past," Laroche told a news conference at the official handover at Kandahar Airfield, a major base for Canadian and coalition troops in southern Afghanistan.

"You know, there's no more pressure on the Van Doos than the others. We get our orders from the chief of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, and our mandate is clear."

Laroche succeeds Tim Grant, who was promoted to major-general during the ceremony by Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Grant, a brigadier-general until his promotion, was in command of Canadian troops in Afghanistan during the past nine months.

Canada has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO force supporting the Afghan government. In the new rotation, most of Canada's troops in Afghanistan will be from CFB Valcartier, near Quebec City.

"What we're going to do, essentially, we'll carry on the good work that has been done," Laroche said.

"We'll be working closely with the Afghans \_ with the police, with the army. And what we want to achieve essentially is to see some progress in different regions."

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Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said Wednesday that Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured.

Training won't take Canadian soldiers out of the line of fire but will prepare Afghans for the eventual departure of NATO troops, O'Connor said in Charlottetown where he was at a Conservative caucus meeting.

Two weeks ago, O'Connor said Canadian troops would basically be in reserve by the end of the current rotation of Van Doos \_ an assertion later contradicted by Hillier.

Laroche said the 1,200-member Afghan army isn't ready to handle the job alone.

The Afghan police also are still being trained by the international community including Canada.

“For years, there weren't police while recruitment candidates don't know what police do,” Laroche said, adding they needed guidance about their duties.

Canada is slated to leave Afghanistan in February 2009. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said extending the mission would require the consensus of Parliament, which will prove difficult given the resistance of opposition parties to the idea.

# SKorean hostage families plead with US Embassy for help in Afghan standoff

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 516

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) \_ Relatives of 21 South Koreans being held in Afghanistan made an emotional appeal to U.S. Embassy officials Wednesday for help in negotiating their release after two weeks as Taliban hostages.

Family members visited the embassy for about an hour and were told their message would be passed along to Washington.

“We will hold on to any small hope to save them,” Ryu Haeng-sik, 36, husband of hostage Kim Yoon-yong, 35, told The Associated Press outside the embassy in central Seoul, his eyes red from weeping and fatigue.

“We cannot say we're relieved, but there is no other way but to believe their words, that they're going to do their best,” he said.

Both the families and the South Korean government have insisted that previous international practice in dealing with abductions be set aside in the interest of human life \_ effectively asking the United States to make an exception to its policy of refusing to make concessions to terrorist demands.

But the United States and other countries strongly criticized Afghanistan earlier this year when it released five Taliban prisoners to win the freedom of an Italian journalist held hostage.

The South Korean president's office said Wednesday that Washington was giving basic co-operation on the standoff.

“We understand their dilemma and limits,” presidential spokesman Cheon Ho-sun said.

“There are some views that the United States holds everything. But that's a lot different from the fact,” he said.

The families have grown increasingly desperate after the Taliban killed two hostages and threatened to shoot more by a Wednesday deadline if their demand to release insurgent prisoners is not met.

The captive group of South Korean volunteers travelled in a church group to Afghanistan's dangerous south against the advice of the Foreign Ministry and were seized from their bus July while 19 en route from the Afghan capital, Kabul, to the city of Kandahar.

Also Wednesday, some 100 protesters \_ from anti-American activist and student groups \_ shouted slogans outside the U.S. Embassy, with about a dozen wearing white masks painted with tears of blood.

Some carried banners reading, “Bush: Don't kill, negotiate” or “Bush, you have responsibility.”

Other signs had a U.S. flag being smashed by a fist and called for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Hundreds of police in riot gear surrounded the demonstrators, bolstering the already large law enforcement

presence at the embassy.

U.S. President George W. Bush ``has a responsibility to intervene and negotiate with the Taliban," said activist Oh Hye-ran. The group handed a petition to embassy officials with a similar plea.

Outrage over the latest killing has sparked increasing calls in South Korea that it send its own troops to punish the Taliban and rescue the remaining captives, with comments on Web message boards calling for military action.

South Korea's presidential office said Tuesday it will not just ``sit by and watch" if the Taliban kills more captives, prompting speculation that a military option might be on the table.

But the spokesman Cheon reiterated Wednesday that Seoul was unchanged in its opposition to a military operation to end the crisis. The families of the remaining hostages have also voiced strong opposition to using force out of fears it would lead to mass deaths.

``There is no reason or need to give up on dialogue at this point," Cheon said, despite the looming deadline. ``There won't be any military operations without our consent."

South Korea has some 200 troops deployed in Afghanistan on a non-combat reconstruction mission.

# O'Connor denies rift with his top general over Afghan mission

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 466

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CHARLOTTETOWN (CP) \_ Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured on the front lines, Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said Wednesday.

O'Connor, in Charlottetown for a summer strategy meeting of the Conservative caucus, has been under fire recently for appearing to be at odds with his chief of defence staff on the Afghanistan mission's timetable.

O'Connor insisted there is "not an iota" of difference between himself and Gen. Rick Hillier on the future of the mission \_ nor with any of the individual Canadian military commanders on the ground in Afghanistan.

"As I've said, and as General Hillier has said, and as General Grant has said, and General Gauthier has said, what we're trying to do in the natural flow of things . . . is that we are shifting now to more operational training of the Afghan army."

Two weeks ago, O'Connor suggested Canadian troops would "basically be in reserve" by the end of the current six-month rotation of Van Doos, an assertion quickly contradicted by Hillier, among others, who said adequate training of Afghan soldiers will take much longer.

O'Connor clarified his remarks Wednesday to emphasize that a training role for Canadian troops is not a holiday and will consume the remaining 18 months of Canada's current military commitment.

"These people go out with the Afghan army, they fight with the Afghan army," he said, noting the recent death of a Canadian soldier on one of the so-called OMLTs, or Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams.

"So it's a very dangerous mission," said O'Connor.

"We're not doing it to reduce casualties. I mean, we try everything to reduce casualties . . . but training the Afghan army has nothing to do with reducing casualties. It has to do with the idea that eventually they take over responsibility for their own country."

He called training Afghan security forces, both army and police, "ultimately the exit strategy for all of NATO."

And he maintained that with Afghanistan roughly halfway toward its goal of having a 70,000-man army by 2010, foreign military intervention is not indefinite.

"It may be a long aid mission, or it may be a long diplomacy or police mission. I don't know," said O'Connor. "But it's not a long military mission."

The minister also said Wednesday that Canada has not been asked by the United Nations to provide combat troops to the Darfur region in Sudan.

Given Canada's 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, any such request would likely prove problematic.

“When you rotate 2,500 soldiers, that means you tie up many times that number . . . .” said O'Connor.

“We have to wait to see if we're asked at all, and my guess \_ I could be wrong \_ is that they won't ask us for combat troops or anything like that. They'll ask us for support or maybe finances or equipment or whatever.”

O'Connor said African or Asian soldiers are more likely candidates for service in Darfur.

“There's no end of troops available from Africa and Asia,” he said. “Some of these other countries have large conscript armies where they can provide large numbers of troops.”

# Afghan army readies military mission in area where S.Korean hostages held

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS  
**PUBLICATION:** cpw  
**WORD COUNT:** 795

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GHAZNI, Afghanistan (AP) \_ The Afghan army dropped leaflets Wednesday warning of impending military action in the region where Taliban militants are holding 21 South Korean hostages, though the army said the operation is not connected to the captives.

Another deadline passed at noon with no word that any of the hostages had been killed, while the local governor said the Taliban militants had agreed to a face-to-face meeting requested by South Korea's ambassador. Two hostages have already been killed, though several deadlines have passed with no killings.

In Ghazni province, where 23 South Koreans were kidnapped on July 19 while driving from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar, Afghan soldiers in helicopters dropped leaflets telling citizens to move to government-controlled areas in order to avoid upcoming military action.

Defence Ministry spokesman Gen. Zahir Azimi said the mission, the start of which could be days or weeks away, had been long-planned and had no connection to the Korean kidnapping case. But a show of military force in the region could place the kidnappers under further pressure.

Gov. Marajudin Pathan said the Taliban agreed to a face-to-face meeting with Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, and officials were looking for suitable location to hold it. Pathan said he did not know when the meeting would happen. He also said another high-ranking official had arrived from South Korea to take part in talks, though he did not know the official's name or position.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban militants, told The Associated Press after the noon deadline passed that the remaining 21 hostages were still alive, though two female captives were gravely ill and could die at any time.

He reiterated that the militants still wanted their key demand met: the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for the lives of the Koreans.

A doctor who heads a private clinic said Afghan doctors would try to visit the hostages Friday and take them medicine. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Wahwaj said he did not have permission from the militants and did not know if the attempt would be successful.

Ahmadi, the purported Taliban spokesman, said Mullah Omar, the Taliban's elusive leader whose whereabouts are unknown, appointed three members of the Taliban's high council to oversee the hostage situation and they have the power to order them killed at any time.

The South Koreans, who are all Christians from the same church, are the largest group of foreign hostages taken in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion that drove the Taliban from power.

Human Rights Watch called for the immediate release of all remaining captives. The New York-based group said the Taliban have kidnapped at least 41 Afghan civilians so far this year and killed at least 23 of them. The rest remain missing.

“The taking of hostages is a war crime,” Joanne Mariner of Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

South Korea said it would send a parliamentary delegation to the United States to seek co-operation in resolving the crisis, and relatives of the hostages pleaded with U.S. Embassy officials during an hour-long visit for help in negotiating their loved ones' release. The families were told their message would be passed on to Washington.

“We will hold on to any small hope to save them,” Ryu Haeng-sik, 36, whose wife Kim Yoon-yong, 35, is one of the hostages, told The Associated Press outside the embassy in Seoul, his eyes red from weeping and fatigue.

“We cannot say we're relieved, but there is no other way but to believe their words, that they're going to do their best,” he said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Tom Casey said: “It's a difficult situation and it's one we want resolved in the best way possible, which is unharmed and safe to their families.”

Both the families and the South Korean government have urged that previous international practice in dealing with abductions be set aside in the interest of human life, effectively asking the United States to make an exception to its policy of refusing to make concessions to terrorist demands.

But the United States and other countries strongly criticized Afghanistan earlier this year when it released five Taliban prisoners to win the freedom of a kidnapped Italian journalist.

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# Quebec-based Van Doos won't be spared from danger in Afghanistan: commander

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**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** cpw

**WORD COUNT:** 442

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# Afghan–Kidnappings

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 125

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INDEX: International, Defence

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There's no word yet on their fate.

Yesterday, Afghan police found the body of the second captive to be killed since members of the church group were seized two weeks ago.

The group's leader was killed last week.

The captors say they want Taliban militants freed from Afghan jails — something South Korea has no authority to do.

Meanwhile, some of the hostages' relatives made an emotional appeal at the U–S Embassy in Seoul today.

They want the U–S to set aside its usual practice of refusing to deal with hostage–takers.

Both the families and government say Washington should make concessions to the militants in the interest of human life.

The embassy says it will pass on the group's demands to Washington.

The U–S and other countries strongly criticized Afghanistan earlier this year when it traded five Taliban prisoners for the freedom of an Italian journalist.

(AP)

LAK

# INDEX:Defence, International

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01  
**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL  
**PUBLICATION:** bnw  
**WORD COUNT:** 102

---

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The handover of command happened at a ceremony this morning at Kandahar Airfield, a major base for Canadian and coalition troops in southern Afghanistan.

Laroche says the Vandoos won't get any special treatment in Afghanistan just because they are from Quebec.

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(BN)

# INDEX:International, Justice, Defence

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**KEYWORDS:** INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE DEFENCE  
**PUBLICATION:** bnw  
**WORD COUNT:** 116

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WASHINGTON – Former U.S. defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld defended himself and took no personal responsibility today for the military's bungled response to Pat Tillman's friendly-fire death in Afghanistan.

Rumsfeld, in his first public appearance on Capitol Hill since he was replaced with Robert Gates late last year, reiterated previous testimony to investigators that he didn't have early knowledge that Tillman was cut down by fellow army rangers.

He told a House committee hearing that he'd always impressed upon Pentagon underlings the importance of telling the truth.

Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, a California Democrat, charged that unanswered questions surrounding Tillman's death reach into the highest ranks of the Pentagon and beyond.

Tillman's mother, Mary Tillman, and other family members watched from the back row.

(AP)

# Soldiers–Return

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01

**KEYWORDS:** DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

**PUBLICATION:** bnw

**WORD COUNT:** 99

---

OROMOCTO, N.B. — The setting sun provided the backdrop for the small contingent of soldiers returning to New Brunswick from Afghanistan.

The troops from C—F—B Gagetown arrived last night after a six—month tour of duty.

Two C—F—18 jets raced overhead as a military Airbus touched down at the Fredericton Airport.

Fay Tidd, the mayor of the town of Oromocto, where the sprawling base is located, says it's a huge relief to have them home.

But the mass homecoming will be tinged with sadness.

Seven soldiers from Gagetown were killed during the rotation.

In Oromocto, virtually every utility pole, signpost and fence in the town of nine—thousand has been decorated with yellow ribbons since the tour began.

Tidd says she expects they'll remain in place for the duration of the Afghan mission.

A larger group of C—F—B Gagetown soldiers is scheduled to arrive Thursday.

(CP)

NMC



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LAK

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**DATE:** 2007.08.01

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**WORD COUNT:** 99

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OROMOCTO, N.B. — The setting sun provided the backdrop for the small contingent of soldiers returning to New Brunswick from Afghanistan.

The troops from C—F—B Gagetown arrived last night after a six—month tour of duty.

Two C—F—18 jets raced overhead as a military Airbus touched down at the Fredericton Airport.

Fay Tidd, the mayor of the town of Oromocto, where the sprawling base is located, says it's a huge relief to have them home.

But the mass homecoming will be tinged with sadness.

Seven soldiers from Gagetown were killed during the rotation.

In Oromocto, virtually every utility pole, signpost and fence in the town of nine—thousand has been decorated with yellow ribbons since the tour began.

Tidd says she expects they'll remain in place for the duration of the Afghan mission.

A larger group of C—F—B Gagetown soldiers is scheduled to arrive Thursday.

(CP)

NMC

# Tories lack consistent message

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**IDNUMBER** 200708020125  
**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Star  
**DATE:** 2007.08.02  
**EDITION:** Ont  
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**PAGE:** A16  
**BYLINE:** James Travers  
**SOURCE:** Toronto Star  
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**WORD COUNT:** 568

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Stephen Harper is in Prince Edward Island this week guiding caucus hands as they rewrite a Conservative message voters aren't receiving clearly or well. At precisely the moment when most federal minority governments are expiring, the ruling party is stagnant in public opinion and searching for momentum to lift it toward majority.

How that's to be done divides Conservatives. For some it's back to the basics of tax cuts, family values and a muscular military – issues the Prime Minister revisited in an evening stump-style speech. Others argue that fresh priorities coupled with an anticipated cabinet shuffle are required to revive a government now too old for its "new" branding.

Both have merit. One served the party well immediately after last year's election victory while the other shares its appeal with applying voltage to a flagging heart. Neither is a substitute for the stories this government can't believably tell.

Blame it in part on the controlling nature that surfaced here in a revealingly authoritarian confrontation over press freedom that turned potentially good news into more bad publicity. Blame it too on ideological certainty that Canadians will eventually accept superior Conservative wisdom if it's just repeated often enough.

Maybe, but to recruit more than one in three Canadians to their cause Conservatives must rediscover the power of frank explanation. Afghanistan and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor's latest effort to convince the country that he and his top general agree on the mission is just one of many instructive examples.

In morphing toward an exit strategy and away from the Prime Minister's promise not to "cut and run," O'Connor and Rick Hillier are sowing confusion over when the suspect Afghan army might be ready to replace Canadians now in harm's way. Stretching the short spin-control leash held by the Prime Ministers Office, O'Connor offered a refreshingly articulate explanation that began shrinking the gaps.

Still, it's just another episode in a long-running serial. An administration that can't decide if it wants to be in Afghanistan to revenge 9/11, kill "scumbags" or build a model democracy is now struggling to explain how it will leave.

Inconsistency is a Conservative communications constant. Strong policy or weak, this government can't figure out what it wants to say or how to say it persuasively.

The result is a necklace of millstones dragging the Prime Minister down. Here in Atlantic Canada a sound Conservative repair to the equalization system Liberals broke is, thanks to a precipitous campaign promise, making the Prime Minister and his party pariahs. Across the country the party is losing arguments on income trusts, the environment and, most of all, the war.

Sometimes substance is the problem. Sometimes the audience refuses to suspend suspicion. Of the two, the second is most damaging.

As Mike Harris demonstrated twice in Ontario, voters will give majorities to parties that tell a straight story even when its appeal is limited. But as Harper must now know, voters don't give the benefit of the doubt to ones that mumble even as they equivocate.

Whatever strategy Conservatives choose here, their tactics will have to change this fall if they are to regain public confidence. In an information age, a government that can't deliver a clear message is just a messenger waiting to be shot.

James Travers' national affairs column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

# PM touts military priority; Election-style speech criticizes Liberals but offers no hints of government's plans

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<b>ILLUSTRATION:</b>	Paul Darrow Reuters The character Anne of Green Gables, portrayed by actor Laura Dunn, centre, poses with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his wife, Laureen, and children, Ben and Rachel, yesterday in Charlottetown. The Prime Minister is in Prince Edward Island for the Conservative caucus's three-day retreat. ;
<b>BYLINE:</b>	Tonda Maccharles
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<b>COPYRIGHT:</b>	© 2007 Torstar Corporation
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Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a stinging attack on the Liberals on the eve of the Conservative party's full national caucus meeting today.

But the Prime Minister, speaking at a barbecue that drew about 1,000 party faithful here, gave no hint in a familiar election-style speech about how his government would move forward or shape the parliamentary agenda to come.

Harper accused his Liberal opponents of blocking the Conservative agenda in Parliament, and of having skewed priorities for the country.

He said the allegations of abuse made by Taliban prisoners handed over by Canadians to Afghan authorities "are their priority for our country." Harper contrasted that with "the Conservative priority" of boosting the military's budget and being "not ashamed of our proud military heritage."

Harper boasted that any of the measures that have passed the minority government were solely "Conservative accomplishments."

Harper admitted to no mistakes on his or his government's part, despite the fact that 19 months after taking power, the Conservative party remains stalled in the polls and still well short of a majority mandate from the electorate.

His bravado about the country being "more united" than ever also masked a deep internal debate right now as the Conservatives struggle over what's next.

Should the government come up with a new slate starting in the fall, or push its unfinished business forward despite political opposition, thereby risking an election it claims not to want?

Yesterday, it seemed that debate would be kept behind closed doors. The party banned reporters from the site of its caucus meeting. The Prime Minister's Office called on hotel management, and eventually the RCMP to order reporters away from the Delta hotel convention centre where MPs were hashing out views in regional caucuses.

An RCMP officer, sending reporters away, said it was on orders from Harper's office. "The PMO has asked me," he said. "There's a time and a place for media."

Still, it was clear MPs who have sounded out constituents all summer are torn about the path ahead.

MP Rahim Jaffer, national caucus chair, dismissed the need for a whole new agenda, saying the priority should be to complete "unfinished business" – a series of criminal justice bills and Senate reform measures that are stalled in the Senate.

"In my opinion there's no real need to refocus and reintroduce new priorities," Jaffer (Edmonton–Strathcona) told reporters. "My preference would be to move that agenda, get it finished, and move those bills that are currently in the waiting list, forward."

Former campaign director and long-time Harper confidant Tom Flanagan, who has already publicly urged Harper to move on more tax cuts and a new small-c conservative agenda, published an opinion piece in The Globe and Mail yesterday urging Harper to play a game of "minority brinkmanship."

Flanagan said the government should push the opposition to the brink on all unpassed bills, declaring them all matters of confidence and daring the Liberals to bring down the government.

One senior party official sniffed yesterday that Flanagan's suggestion is "one option." He did not appear to appreciate the public push from Flanagan, the party's former campaign director and Harper's one-time operations manager.

But Calgary Centre MP Lee Richardson agreed with Flanagan.

"I think the government probably should have more confidence in proceeding with things and not letting them be watered down by the opposition with the threat of an election hanging over them because I don't think they're going to call an election either. I don't think they will defeat us."

Richardson also said the government should bring in a new Speech from the Throne and a new agenda with a greater focus on tax cuts.

Wellington–Halton Hills MP Michael Chong said constituents were happy with the government, which is "just at the midway point" of its term, he said.

"They're happy that we're focused on doing the things we said we'd do," he said, citing backing the military in Afghanistan, acting on the environment, and boosting infrastructure spending.



# Training of Afghans called key to NATO's exit strategy; But Canadian soldiers will still face dangers during this front-line work, defence minister says

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**BYLINE:** Tonda MacCharles  
**SOURCE:** Toronto Star  
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Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor says the key to NATO's "exit strategy" from Afghanistan is to train the Afghan army to become self-sufficient – dangerous work he warns will still entail Canadian casualties.

But O'Connor said Afghanistan's social stability, and not rising Canadian casualties, should determine Canada's future commitment.

With no surge or new influx of NATO troops in the offing, and a deadline 18 months away for Canada's combat mission in Kandahar to end unless Parliament extends it, O'Connor said Canada is being "practical" and shifting the focus to more operational training of Afghan troops. "We are trying to make the security forces of Afghanistan in our area as effective as possible because that's ultimately the exit strategy of all of NATO," O'Connor told a handful of reporters at the Conservative caucus retreat.

"When the government is stable, when it can deliver services, economic development is going ahead and the security forces, the army and the police are effective, (then) they're looking after their own country."

Training Afghan troops does not mean keeping Canadian soldiers "safely in a camp training the army somewhere," but means sending more operational mentoring and leadership teams into the field with the Afghan army – meaning they will inevitably face danger, he said.

Critics of the mission and even Prime Minister Stephen Harper have complained that Canada has been left with an unfair military burden in southern Afghanistan because some NATO countries are not pulling their weight.

In Chile two weeks ago, Harper said the number of soldiers fighting in Afghanistan is "not sufficient to achieve the long-run objectives that the international community and NATO have set for themselves."

Nonetheless, said O'Connor, the federal government has decided to be "practical" and act where it can.

The Afghan Compact, an agreement 60 countries have signed with Afghanistan, aims to have trained 70,000 Afghan troops by 2010. O'Connor says about half that number, 30,000 to 35,000, have been readied for responsibilities.

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He acknowledged that getting Afghanistan to the point of social stability is a prescription for a long mission, "but it's not necessarily a military mission. It may be a long aid mission, or it may be a long diplomacy or police mission, I don't know, but it's not a long military mission."

O'Connor has come under fire for projecting a more optimistic picture than his chief of defence staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, of how soon the Afghan army can be trained.

But yesterday he denied there was "one iota" of difference between the two. He said that over the next six months, in addition to the one Afghan army battalion that Canadian forces have mentored and trained in Kandahar, there will be four or five more battalions to train.

"This information I provided ... I received from Gen. Hillier," he said. "I don't make this stuff up."

He also denied any rift between the two, blaming media for creating differences that don't exist. "I talk to Gen. Hillier every day."

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# Van Doos won't be coddled

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**PUBLICATION:** The Winnipeg Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.08.02  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 8  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of GUY LAROCHE "Our mandate is clear"  
**BYLINE:** MARTIN OUELLET, CP  
**WORD COUNT:** 193

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KANDAHAR — Canada's new military commander in Afghanistan says soldiers from Quebec's famed Van Doo regiment won't get any special treatment to keep them out of harm's way.

With antiwar sentiment already running high in Quebec — a province in which the Conservatives need more seats to form a majority government — some observers believe the government does not want Quebec-based soldiers putting their lives at risk on the front lines.

'THE WORK GOES ON'

But Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche said yesterday the Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doos, will face the same dangers as other Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

"Regardless of what is said in Canada, at a political level or on the street, the work goes on just as it has in the past," Laroche said during the official handover at Kandahar Airfield.

"You know, there's no more pressure on the Van Doos than the others. We get our orders from the chief of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, and our mandate is clear."

Laroche succeeds Tim Grant, who was promoted to major-general during the ceremony by Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, head of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said in Charlottetown that Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Leaflets warn of Afghan operation

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Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.08.02  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 8  
**BYLINE:** AP  
**DATELINE:** GHAZNI  
**WORD COUNT:** 270

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Another deadline passed at noon with no word that any hostages had been killed, while the local governor said the Taliban militants had agreed to a face-to-face meeting requested by South Korea's ambassador. Two hostages have already been killed.

## LONG-PLANNED MISSION

In Ghazni province, where 23 South Koreans were kidnapped July 19 while driving from Kabul to Kandahar, Afghan soldiers in helicopters dropped leaflets telling citizens to move to government-controlled areas in order to avoid upcoming military action.

Defence ministry spokesman Gen. Zahir Azimi said the mission, which could be days or weeks away, had been long-planned and had no connection to the hostages.

Gov. Marajudin Pathan said the Taliban agreed to a meeting with Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, and officials were looking for a suitable location. Pathan said another high-ranking official had arrived from South Korea.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban militants, told The Associated Press after the noon deadline passed that the remaining hostages were alive, though two females were gravely ill and could die at any time.

## TALIBAN PRISONERS

He reiterated that the militants still wanted their key demand met — the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for the lives of the Koreans.

A doctor who heads a private clinic said Afghan doctors would try to visit the hostages tomorrow and take them medicine. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Wahwaj said he did not have permission from the militants.

Ahmadi, the purported Taliban spokesman, said Mullah Omar, the Taliban's elusive leader, appointed three members of the Taliban's high council to oversee the hostage situation and they have the power to order them killed. KEYWORDS=WORLD

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# Van Doos won't be coddled

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**SOURCETAG** 0708020273  
**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.08.02  
**EDITION:** Final  
**SECTION:** News  
**PAGE:** 14  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of GUY LAROCHE "Our mandate is clear"  
**BYLINE:** MARTIN OUELLET, CP  
**DATELINE:** KANDAHAR  
**WORD COUNT:** 191

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**SOURCETAG** 0708010468  
**PUBLICATION:** The Toronto Sun  
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**EDITION:** Final  
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**PAGE:** 16  
**BYLINE:** PAUL BERTON  
**COLUMN:** Editorial  
**WORD COUNT:** 249

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**SECTION:** News  
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**PAGE:** A8

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## LONG-PLANNED MISSION

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Defence ministry spokesman Gen. Zahir Azimi said the mission, which could be days or weeks away, had been long-planned and had no connection to the hostages.

Gov. Marajudin Pathan said the Taliban agreed to a meeting with Korea's ambassador to Afghanistan, and officials were looking for a suitable location. Pathan said another high-ranking official had arrived from South Korea.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban militants, told The Associated Press after the noon deadline passed that the remaining hostages were alive, though two females were gravely ill and could die at any time.

## TALIBAN PRISONERS

He reiterated that the militants still wanted their key demand met — the release of Taliban prisoners in exchange for the lives of the Koreans.

A doctor who heads a private clinic said Afghan doctors would try to visit the hostages tomorrow and take them medicine. Dr. Mohammad Hashim Wahwaj said he did not have permission from the militants.

Ahmadi, the purported Taliban spokesman, said Mullah Omar, the Taliban's elusive leader, appointed three members of the Taliban's high council to oversee the hostage situation and they have the power to order them killed. KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Van Doos won't be coddled

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**PUBLICATION:** The Edmonton Sun  
**DATE:** 2007.08.02  
**EDITION:** Final  
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**PAGE:** 37  
**ILLUSTRATION:** photo of GUY LAROCHE "Our mandate is clear"  
**BYLINE:** MARTIN OUELLET, CP  
**DATELINE:** KANDAHAR  
**WORD COUNT:** 191

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Canada's new military commander in Afghanistan says soldiers from Quebec's famed Van Doo regiment won't get any special treatment to keep them out of harm's way.

With antiwar sentiment already running high in Quebec — a province in which the Conservatives need more seats to form a majority government — some observers believe the government does not want Quebec-based soldiers putting their lives at risk on the front lines.

'THE WORK GOES ON'

But Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche said yesterday the Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doos, will face the same dangers as other Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

"Regardless of what is said in Canada, at a political level or on the street, the work goes on just as it has in the past," Laroche said during the official handover at Kandahar Airfield.

"You know, there's no more pressure on the Van Doos than the others. We get our orders from the chief of national defence, Gen. Rick Hillier, and our mandate is clear."

Laroche succeeds Tim Grant, who was promoted to major-general during the ceremony by Lt.-Gen. Michel Gauthier, head of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said in Charlottetown that Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

# Shifting gears Troops still in danger despite changing role: O'Connor

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<b>ILLUSTRATION:</b>	photo of GORDON O'CONNOR Focus on training Afghan soldiers
<b>BYLINE:</b>	CP
<b>DATELINE:</b>	CHARLOTTETOWN
<b>WORD COUNT:</b>	194

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Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor says Canada's military focus in Afghanistan is shifting toward training but that won't stop Canadian soldiers from being killed or injured.

O'Connor, in Charlottetown for a strategy meeting of the Conservative caucus, has been under fire recently for appearing to be at odds with his chief of defence staff on the Afghanistan mission's timetable.

O'Connor insists there is "not an iota" of difference between himself and Gen. Rick Hillier on the future of the mission.

The minister, a former general, says he and all the generals overseeing the Afghan operations have said that training the Afghan army will be the emphasis between now and February 2009, when Canada's military mandate in the country is scheduled to end.

He says training won't take Canadian soldiers out of the line of fire, but will prepare Afghans for the eventual departure of NATO troops from the wartorn country.

Two weeks ago, O'Connor said Canadian troops would basically be in reserve by the end of the current rotation of Van Doos, an assertion quickly contradicted by Hillier.

O'Connor also says Canada has not been asked by the United Nations to provide combat troops to the Darfur region in Sudan, and guesses that any request for assistance would involve equipment, transport or aid dollars rather than boots on the ground. KEYWORDS=CANADA

# Leaflets warn of Afghan operation

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