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U.S., Afghan leaders discuss violence; President Hamid Karzai faces competing troubles at home

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U.S. President George W. Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday began a search for answers to the deteriorating security and sporadic rule of law in Afghanistan.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home — a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed with Bush. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert and extend its authority.

Karzai arrived on a misty afternoon in the Catoctin Mountains. He was greeted by Bush and first lady Laura Bush, who led him through a cordon of Marines and Navy sailors.

Karzai chatted briefly with a few of Bush's top aides, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Robert Gates. Then he climbed in the front in Bush's local ride — Golf Cart One — while the first lady got in back. President Bush drove them away after wheeling the golf cart into a playful spin for the gathered media.

Ahead of his arrival, Karzai offered a reminder of the trouble that remains nearly six years after U.S. and coalition forces entered his country. In the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the United States and its allies have essentially gotten nowhere lately, Karzai said.

"We are not closer, we are not further away from it," Karzai said in an interview with CNN's "Late Edition," which aired yesterday. "We are where we were a few years ago."

Karzai ruled out that bin Laden was in Afghanistan, but otherwise said he didn't know where the leader of the al-Qaida terror network was likely to be hiding.

Bin Laden, the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is believed to be living in the tribal border region of Pakistan. His ability to avoid capture remains a major source of frustration for U.S.-led forces and a political sore spot for Bush.

Afghanistan's fragility remains of paramount concern to the United States.

"Karzai wants to shore up his ties in Washington," said Teresita Schaffer, a former top State Department official for south Asia. "And I think the U.S. government very much wants to get a stronger sense of how we can develop a common political strategy."

Despite its progress since U.S.-led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness. Stability has been hindered by the lack of government order, particularly in the southern part of the country.

"The security situation in Afghanistan over the past two years has definitely deteriorated," Karzai said in the interview. "There is no doubt about that."

Overshadowing the Bush-Karzai meeting is the fate of 21 South Korean volunteers who were abducted by the Taliban on July 19 and are now believed to be in central Afghanistan. The captors took a total of 23 people hostage and have shot and killed two of them.

Time to rethink Afghan participation

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Human beings have a wonderful defence mechanism. They can virtually ignore important things in the world around them — war, climate change — allowing them to carry on their daily lives, keeping them sane. However, this same mechanism can prevent them from understanding and acting on certain issues, even in their own best interest.

The defence mechanisms of the citizens of Kingston, Ont. have been taking a beating since the death of Capt. Matthew Dawe, the city's second Afghan war victim. With numerous reports of the young man's violent death by roadside bomb — along with five other soldiers and an Afghan interpreter — and the suffering of his prominent military family, the realities and tragedies of battle have made their way into local homes.

At the same time, the war's supporters are exhorting citizens to strengthen their resolve in the fight for freedom — making it awkward for those opposed. Just days before Dawe's death, more than 2,000 people attended Dawe's funeral. Needless to say, this change in the status of war from abstract to very real, this collapse of people's defence mechanisms, is not a good thing. However, it illustrates — as does every death and injury since 2001 — how desperately we need a national debate on Canada's presence in Afghanistan. It is time we asked some very serious, possibly unpleasant and controversial questions.

We must begin with an assessment of our overall goal in the region. Our main ally, the United States, has a blighted history there. The CIA conducted its very first coup in Iran, 1953, overthrowing a democratically elected government and installing the Shah, who became a cruel dictator. When the Islamic fundamentalists finally tossed out the Shah, they vowed they wouldn't be "liberal" victims of the U.S., like their democratic forerunners.

Today, the U.S. purports to be spreading democracy and freedom. I find this difficult to believe in light of its behaviour in Iraq just after the invasion. As Administrator for the Coalition Provisional Government, American Paul Bremer imposed several major changes — "orders" — on the country, such as free trade, privatization, a flat tax. He granted full immunity to foreign corporations from Iraqi laws. He even made it illegal for farmers to re-use seeds from their plants, as they have done for centuries, thus helping giant corporations like Monsanto.

In other words, the U.S. forced Iraqis to accept its version of extreme capitalism, its values, its interests, regardless of their own economic needs and culture. This isn't democracy, and it is a far cry from the moderate approach Stephen Harper was touting on his recent trip to South America and the Caribbean. But is the U.S. model what we are fighting for in Afghanistan?

Militant fundamentalism is similar to communism. It provides a disciplined response to perceived injustices — internal and external — and American geo-political and economic agendas are fanning its flames.

(Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iraq, the resurgence of the Taliban, and more) Do we really want to be part of this destructive dynamic? Can we not think of a more positive role?

Concerning Afghanistan, we must also ask ourselves about the immorally high number of civilian deaths caused, according to President Karzai, by coalition forces' "extreme use of force", the inhumane detentions, the torture. These aren't mere details or unavoidable side effects. And what about the corrupt government? Karzai's election was marred by complaints of fraud and improper procedures. Is this really our style?

Finally, there is the *raison d'être* of the war itself. I have read that the FBI has not laid charges against Osama bin Laden in relation to 9/11, presumably because it lacks the evidence to do so. If this is the case, do we have enough evidence to sacrifice our young people's lives?

n Kathleen O'Hara is a contributor to The Issues Network, a collection of independent writers across Canada.

Bush, Karzai try to find answers to Afghanistan situation

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Daughter's winning photo adds more excitement to soldier's homecoming

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Lindsay Arndt of Fredericton Junction was excited when her photo of her dad and brother won third place at an international competition.

But that excitement only adds to how she feels about seeing her father, who is set to come back from Afghanistan at the end of the month.

Cpl. Duane Arndt has been in the war torn since February with the 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR).

Arndt's winning photo is of her dad hugging her three-year-old brother, DJ, the day before he left for his tour of duty six months ago.

The 14-year-old used PhotoShop as part of the competition and added a Canadian flag, a tree with a yellow ribbon tied around it and the line "God keep our land," from O Canada, to the photo.

She entered the contest with Hoyt Christian School where she is about to start Grade 9.

The contest is part of the accelerated Christian education conventions which take place around the world.

Though there are few accelerated Christian education schools in the region, the international convention has participants from around the world compete in 120 different categories.

Arndt said she was happy when she won the third prize medal and so was her dad, who helped her with some of the ideas for the background of the picture.

"He was so excited for me," she said. "He knew I worked really hard on it."

Her grandmother, Ruth Burt, is also the school's principal.

She said the family and community were proud that Arndt did so well.

"She had several entries in the top 15 and I was happy that it was this picture that did win because we're proud of my son-in-law, who's in Afghanistan, too."

Arndt said she never expected to do so well.

"The convention is for people from all over the world, so I didn't think that a girl from Fredericton Junction would do as good as I did."

Family has big plans for dad's return

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Ashley Simmons can't wait to see her dad's plane land in Fredericton later today.

The nine-year-old Burton girl said she's going to maximize her quality time with him.

"We're going to go on a daddy-daughter date, that's all I know," Ashley said. "We're probably going to go to a movie. We'll go see Underdog."

Sgt. Robert Simmons, Ashley's father, is one of the Canadian Forces Base Gagetown soldiers returning home tonight after serving six months in Afghanistan.

His wife Gloria, Ashley and sons Jason, Bobby and Kyle say they're excited to have him home.

"I just want to give him a great big bear hug," Gloria Simmons said.

She said she felt so relieved the day he left Afghanistan for Cypress before flying to Canada.

"It was as if all the pressure of the last six months just vanished in thin air, and the body comes crashing down with relaxation," she said.

"I just haven't been able to find the energy level again since that point."

But her energy in the past few days has been spent on preparing a homecoming celebration for her husband.

They decorated the picture window with several stickers of hearts.

"We're giving him a heart attack," she joked.

They've also been working on posters to welcome him back to his home.

Simmons said her husband has missed several important days and they're going to celebrate them all again.

"Dad's going to find a lot of changes," she said. "Bobby turned 16 on him. Jason turned 13 on him. Kyle graduated from middle school this year.

"There's a lot of occasions that were missed in that short period of time that will be celebrated when he gets home."

The children already have plans for their dad, whether it's hitting the movie theatre or playing golf.

And at the end of the month, the Simmons family is going on a vacation.

Still, Simmons remembers how hard it was when her husband first left for Afghanistan.

"There were a lot of tears and apprehension," she said. "But we talked a lot about it and I think we were ready. The kids have been great while he was gone.

"In some ways, now that we're at the tail end, it doesn't feel like it has been six months.

"But when we were at the beginning, it felt like a year and a half until the next time we would see him."

Simmons said the community was supportive.

She attended deployment coffee nights on Tuesdays where she met many new friends who helped her cope with her husband's absence.

Jason said his classmates also helped him deal with his father's deployment.

"It was helpful that some of our friends' fathers went, so we had something to talk about," he said.

Simmons said help from friends and family is important to make it through the deployment.

"I think the whole key to a successful deployment is a good support system," she said.

"If you've got that behind you, you can make it, no problem."

Soldiers will continue to return home every second day over the next six weeks as 2,500 Canadian troops are rotated out of Afghanistan.

[Public Lecture: Canada's role in Afghanistan, speaker Scott Taylor, today, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., University of King's College.General Meeting: Mainland South Heritage Society, guest speakers...]

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ILLUSTRATION: Two St. Patrick's fans covered in green paint taunt QEH fans at the last annual Turkey Bowl between the Irish and the QEH Lions on Saturday. But St. Pat's came out empty as they were shut out by the Lions. (Eric Wynne / Staff)

WORD COUNT: 982

Public Lecture: Canada's role in Afghanistan, speaker Scott Taylor, today, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., University of King's College.General Meeting: Mainland South Heritage Society, guest speakers Murray and Gary Wright, today, 6:30 p.m., Captain William Spry Centre.Film Screening: An Inconvenient Truth. Al Gore's documentary examines global warming, and the moral imperative to act now at the Hubbards Barn Theatre today at 8:30 p.m. Discussion to follow. Tickets at door.

Public Panel Discussion: Growing Against the Grain, today, 7–9 p.m., Halifax North Memorial Public Library.

Blood Donor Clinics: Immanuel Baptist Church, today 1–3 p.m., church hall, 5–8 p.m.; NS Liquor Corp. Bayer's Lake, Monday, 12–3 p.m.

Public Lecture Series: Nova Scotia Association of Architects, Dr. Thomas Homer–Dixon, today, 7 p.m., Pier 21 Heritage Hall.

Wine Tasting: In support of St. Matthew's United, Friday, 7–9 p.m., Argyle Fine Art.

Yard Sale: Halifax Elms Golden Hearts, Saturday, 8–11 a.m., J. Wesley Smith United Church basement.

Barefoot Ecstatic Dance: Surrender to the music and open up to spontaneous dance, Saturday, 7:30–9:30 p.m., DANSpace.

Children Celebrating Cycling: Bike inspired art along Barrington Street shop windows.

Bike Safety Rodeos: Presented by the Halifax Regional Police, Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sunday, noon to 2 p.m., Halifax Forum. Choral Workshop: Folksong collection of Dr. Helen Creighton, Saturday 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., St. James Anglican Church Parish Hall. In Full Bloom Festival: North end neighbourhood talent, Saturday, 3 to 10 p.m., Bloomfield Centre.

Quilt and Fibre Arts Festival: Gallery, vendors, lectures, more Saturday, Sunday, CUnard Event Centre.

Mcnamara Trout–A–Rama: Recreational fishing contest, Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Cunard Pond, Williams Lake Road.

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Turkey Supper: Saturday, 4–6 p.m., Saint Margaret of Scotland Church Hall.

Bean Supper and Auction: Fundraiser for Judy (Arnold) Landry, Sunday, supper 3–5 p.m., auction, 5–9, for tickets or to make donation, 434–7519, St. Andrews Community Centre.

Walk for Muscular Dystrophy: Funds raised Sunday to support family services, education, The Atlantic Mobility Equipment Program and research for a cure. Following the walk, there will be entertainment by The Odd Couples Band, a four-piece ensemble with Celtic sound, and a BBQ hosted by local firefighters.

Visit to register, sponsor a walker or donate. Registration starts at noon and the walk starts at 1 p.m. at the Seawalk Stage, Casino Nova Scotia. Yard Sale: Halifax Dance hosts fundraiser, Sunday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Maritime Centre.

Beach Cleanup: McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park, Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., meet at Murphy's on the Water, Halifax waterfront before 10 a.m. Carolyn, 477–0187. Baby Shower Donations: Heritage Credit Union is helping Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) by organizing a baby shower and accepting donations of new baby-related items for the new SHYM facility and its six branches, this month and next, during credit union hours.

El Viento Flamenco School of Dance: Ten-week summer session, three classes per week to choose from, starting Monday through August 11, information 425–3480.

The Taoist Tai Chi Beginner Classes: Monday, noon to 1 p.m. and 6–8 p.m., Wednesday, noon to 1 p.m., Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada Atlantic Regional Centre.

Summer Voice Class: Rediscover the joy of singing with others, classes start Tuesday, Maritime Conservatory of the Performing Arts, registration 423–6995.

Slide Show: Bicycling Across Canada, Wayne Groszko shares photos and stories, Tuesday, 7 p.m., Captain William Spry Public Library.

Film Screening: The Nova Scotia Film Development Corp. is sponsoring a screening of Paul Kimball's latest documentary, Best Evidence: Top 10 UFO Sightings, and Mike MacDonald's latest documentary, Famous Monster, about sci-fi legend Forrest J. Ackerman, at the Oxford Theatre, Wednesday at 7 p.m. Admission is free. Best Evidence features some of the world's leading UFO experts, including Stanton Friedman, Dr. Bruce Maccabee, Nick Pope, and Mac Tonnies, as well as a number of high-ranking military witnesses. Famous Monster features interviews with many sci-fi legends, including Ray Bradbury, Roger Corman and Joe Dante.

Halifax

onstage

Shakespeare in the Park: As You Like It, Saturday, Sunday, 1 p.m., Fort Ogilvie, Point Pleasant Park.

Beauty and the Beast: Based on the animated feature film. Belle uncovers the gentle side of The Beast, to July 1. Neptune Theatre, Halifax.

6X6: Brave New Works: Live Art Dance Productions, to Saturday, 8 p.m., The Bus Stop Theatre.

God's Middle Name: Show based on the book, Snapshots of Autism by Jennifer Overton, Friday to June 9, tickets, 429–7070, Neptune's Studio Theatre.

[Public Lecture: Canada's role in Afghanistan, speaker Scott Taylor, today, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., University of K

Jeers: Halifax Feast Dinner Theatre presents a Maritime comedy – where everyone knows your name, Wednesdays to Sundays, 6:30 p.m., to June. Reservations, 420–1840.

My Big Fat Loser: Musical comedy about Ronny and Leona's wedding, to June 3. For reservations call Amy, 425–1961. Grafton Street Dinner Theatre.

HalifaxCONCERTS

An Evening of Indian Music: Pt. Satish Vyas Aantoor, Vineet Vyas Tabla, Saturday, 7:30 p.m., Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts, Halifax.

Marlene Cormier–Cox and Donna Marie Barnes: CD release concert, Saturday, 7 p.m., Compass Room, Casino Nova Scotia.

Dusty Keeler: Performs songs from his upcoming release, Under The Radar and Over the Canyon, Saturday, The Wired Monk.

The Q–Tips: Public concert, Sunday, 4 p.m., St. Matthew's United Church.

Halifax Concert Band: Spring concert, Tuesday, 7 p.m., St. Agnes Church.

Thomas and Friends: Live on stage, Wednesday, Exhibition Park.

Scotia Festival of Music: Classical music concerts and master classes at various locations, June 10, Halifax. Tickets, 459–9467 or 1–800–528–9883.

Halifax

Museums

Discovery Centre: Cool Moves, the Artistry of Motion; Carnival Incredible; High–definition movies including Creature Features, interactive and hands–on exhibits, live science demos like The Big Chill.

Maritime Command Museum: Discover Canada's Navy, uniforms, models, medals, more.

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic: Shipwrecks exhibit and kiosk; Vincent Coleman display, Halifax Explosion exhibit; New Life for the Model of RMS Franconia; Illustrated talks, workshops, tours, demonstrations.

Museum of Natural History: Reptile and Amphibian Show and Tell, Saturday, 1–4 p.m., Wings over the Atlantic, to Sept. 9, Art exhibit, Endangered Marine Animals of the Atlantic, Jeff Domm, to June 22; Reptile roundups, tours, Gus the Tortoise, bug cooking, Nature–a–la–Carte, illustrated talks. 424–3563.

films Still Playing

Nancy Drew: Teen detective Nancy accom–panies her father on a business trip, where she happens upon clues to a murder mystery involving a movie star. Starring Emma Roberts, Josh Flitter.

Knocked Up: For fun loving Ben Stone, the last thing he expected was for his one night stand to show up on his doorstep to tell him she's pregnant. Starring Katherine Heigl, Seth Rogen.

Mr. Brooks: Psychological thriller about a man who is controlled by alter ego. Starring Kevin Costner, Demi

[Public Lecture: Canada's role in Afghanistan, speaker Scott Taylor, today, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., University of K

Moore.

Opening Friday

Fracture: A man caught between two different lives tries to figure out which is real. Starring, Laura Bertram, Brandy Ledford. Bayers Lake.

28 Weeks Later: Six months after the rage virus broke out on the British Isles, the U.S. army secures a small area of London for survivors. Stars Robert Carlyle, Rose Byrne.

Bush, Karzai mull Afghanistan security

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Despite its progress since U.S.–led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness.

More Afghan heroin makes way to Canada; Counter-narcotics efforts clearly flawed, says report researcher

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.08.06
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A3
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
BYLINE: Steve Rennie
WORD COUNT: 725

The Mounties have warned at least two federal agencies that Afghan heroin is "increasingly" making its way to Canada and poses a direct threat to the public despite millions of dollars from Ottawa to fund the war-torn country's counter-narcotics efforts, newly released documents reveal.

"The RCMP informs us that Afghan heroin is increasingly ending up on, or is destined for Canadian streets," say Foreign Affairs and Defence Department briefings, obtained separately by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

The Afghan-produced heroin "directly threatens" Canadians, say the identically worded briefings.

Paul Nadeau, the director of the RCMP's drug branch in Ottawa, said about 60 per cent of the heroin on Canadian streets comes from Afghanistan.

"Keep in mind, though, that when we seize it, it doesn't have a stamp on it that says where it came from," he said.

Rather, it's the investigative tracing of smuggling routes that reveals the drug's country of origin.

Until a few years ago, most heroin came from an opium-producing region in Southeast Asia called the "golden triangle," a mountainous area of around 350,000 square kilometres overlapping Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand.

In recent years, organized crime groups from Southeast Asia have taken to trafficking synthetic drugs, such as ecstasy, which have more users – and more profitability – than heroin, Nadeau said.

New traffickers, who Nadeau said are often, but not always, of Indian origin, have stepped in, bringing with them new shipping methods.

The Southeast Asian traffickers were notorious for brazen heroin shipments, sometimes totalling up to 100 kilograms a haul. The new traffickers typically prefer smaller, but more frequent, shipments, Nadeau said. The strategy, it seems, is akin to throwing as much as possible against the wall to see what sticks.

"It seems to be involving the classic couriers, suitcases at the airport, smaller amounts, but no doubt, more shipments coming in," he said.

Roughly 92 per cent of the world's heroin comes from opium poppies grown in Afghanistan, according to the 2007 World Drug Report, released in June by the United Nations Office on Drugs.

Afghan heroin typically flows into Canada through two main trafficking arteries, Nadeau said: via the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and then onto India and, finally, Canada; and, from Afghanistan to western Africa, then through the United States into Canada.

The Foreign Affairs and Defence Department briefings differ on the windfall opium production and trafficking yields in Afghanistan, estimating it is equivalent to between 25 and 60 per cent of the Afghan economy.

Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Ambra Dickie says Ottawa has pledged about \$57 million to fund Afghan counter-narcotics efforts, including an \$18.5-million program to promote alternate livelihoods in the country's volatile Kandahar province, where Canadian troops are stationed.

The Afghan counter-narcotics programs are co-ordinated by that country's national drug control strategy. But the drug control strategy is badly flawed, said Thomas Pietschmann, a researcher who authored the UN drug report.

"It's clear: there is a disaster there. Nobody can say that it's working. It's not working," Pietschmann said from his office in Vienna, Austria.

Afghanistan's counter-narcotics minister stepped down last month after the country's opium poppy crop ballooned under his watch. Habibullah Qaderi's resignation came as western embassies and the Afghan government hold closed door meetings about how to fight the country's growing drug problem.

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Afghanistan's swelling opium crop might lower heroin's street value in Canada, Nadeau said, adding he doubts more people will start using heroin because it's cheaper and there's more of it.

"Heroin is not what it used to be. There's a certain stigma attached to it from the user population," he said. "But it's definitely a problem in certain major centres."

The Foreign Affairs briefing concedes there's no quick fix to Afghanistan's drug quandary: "There are no simple solutions to a problem that has taken decades to develop."

At first glance, Canada doesn't seem to have a heroin problem. Less than one per cent of Canadians have used the drug at some point in their lives, according to the latest report from Health Canada and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

But it's difficult to gauge the real prevalence of heroin use in Canada, since most users don't partake in national surveys, said a Centre on Substance Abuse spokeswoman.

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Bush, Afghan leader talk about surging violence

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.06

SECTION: Canada/World

PAGE: B6

COLUMN: Around the globe

SOURCE: AP

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, Md.

ILLUSTRATION: Karzai

WORD COUNT: 79

President Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Sunday began a search for answers to the deteriorating security and sporadic rule of law in Afghanistan.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home – a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed with Bush. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert and extend its authority.

Don't travel with this man: he's jinxed

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.06

SECTION: Opinion

PAGE: A7

COLUMN: Political analysis

BYLINE: Don Martin

DATELINE: KABUL

WORD COUNT: 831

When confronted by administrative inertia in Afghanistan, the correct response is to unleash bribes.

With my Ariana jet sitting on the tarmac, luggage checked and seat assigned, all that kept me from the swim-up bar in a Dubai hotel was a passport stamp and a 90-minute flight aboard one of the world's most dangerous airlines where passengers actually applaud a safe landing.

But in what became a cruel climax to a seven-week jinx of an assignment here, the passport guy spotted two irregularities on my visa.

One, it had expired. I had paid the Afghanistan Embassy in Ottawa for a multiple-entry visa, but they only issued a shorter single-trip visa. Happens all the time, I was told, and veteran Afghanistan travellers say a \$20 bill slipped into the correct hands would take care of that in a hurry.

But somehow the visa also had a stamp showing I had departed the country a month earlier, even though on that particular date I was sitting in a forward operating base sweating under a scorching sun with Canadian soldiers and drooling at the thought of an iced cappuccino.

Standing in passport control, a very suspicious officer wanted to know how I'd snuck back into his country without getting stamped, an ironic accusation given this is among the last countries on Earth I'd want to revisit.

Having no explanation for this mystery stamp was, I figured, a \$50 problem. No, said the senior police officer identified by a friendly (and bribed) baggage handler as the best problem-fixer in the airport, it was a \$150 problem.

After being guided to a corner away from passenger eyes, his palm was discreetly extended for the cash. It seemed a tad pricey given these guys earn \$70 a month and the cost of a visa in Ottawa was only a hundred dollars, but the plane was boarding with my luggage in the hold and that added considerable urgency to my predicament. So I paid the expedited 'exit fee,' got back into line and observed with confidence the cop giving the passport officer a beaming thumbs-up.

But something happened during those final steps to palm-greased freedom that, one supposes, could be good news or bad news to a government internationally reviled as dishonest. The good news is that there's one honest passport control officer in Afghanistan. The bad news is that I discovered him at the precise moment I needed the common corrupted variety. And what could be worse? Well, the cop had mysteriously vanished with my failed bribe in his pocket.

So here I sit, down \$150 and stranded for a fifth unplanned day in a Kabul guest house with nasty explosions going off in the not-far-enough distance as I write this, waiting to be rescued by Canadian Ambassador Arif

Lalani.

Now Lalani is a uniquely charismatic and effective diplomat and I would say this only slightly less emphatically if he wasn't my only hope of escape – but even his office says it could take a week to get a visa in the Afghanistan capital that can be issued in Ottawa within 24 hours.

At the risk of belabouring the point, this is but the grande finale to an alarming sequence of events for a columnist nicknamed Disaster Don by his embedded media colleagues.

After covering the suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 35 people as I was arriving in the capital, I reached the Kandahar base just five minutes before a news conference to announce three Canadian soldier casualties. Then a four-day outing with a reconstruction team was forced to withdraw from good-deed-doing by the unexpected re-emergence of Taliban in the district. An offhanded remark about how glad I was that we'd gone two weeks without Canadian casualties was barely out of my mouth before military officers arrived at the media tent to announce six more soldier deaths. Then came a three-day military operation that hit four improvised explosive devices en route to a 12-day wait for supplies in a particularly barren stretch of Taliban-infested desert.

After hearing my litany of woes as a convoy prepared to leave the base under his command, Lt.-Col. Bob Chamberlain made the obvious observation. "I don't want you anywhere near me." With that, he placed me in the last armoured car of the convoy while he took a position up front. Don't misconstrue all this poor-me stuff as the whining bleat of a journalist stranded in a dangerous amenity-free backwater. It's been an interesting adventure. And the guest house where I'm stranded has a nice garden and serves cold beer on demand. It's just a triple warning to anyone preparing to visit this sad war-torn country. Keep your visa current and devoid of exit stamps before you actually depart Afghanistan. Understand that bribes only work 99.5 per cent of the time. And if I'm still stranded here when you arrive, keep your distance just in case non-stop disaster afflictions are contagious.

Don Martin writes for the Calgary Herald.

Mounties warn Afghan heroin headed to Canadian streets

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.06

SECTION: The Province/Canada

PAGE: A5

COLUMN: Across the nation

BYLINE: The Canadian Press

WORD COUNT: 116

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Taliban says negotiations taking place for possible meeting with Korean officials

DATE: 2007.08.05
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 449

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) _ Face-to-face talks between the Taliban and South Korean officials over the fate of 21 hostages will not happen unless the officials travel to Taliban territory or the UN guarantees the militants' safety elsewhere, a purported spokesman said Sunday.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, said the militants had talked to the Korean officials ``many times" over the phone the last three days but that there had been ``no results."

``We gave them two choices: either come to Taliban-controlled territory or meet us abroad," Ahmadi said from an unknown location. ``They accepted these options and told us, 'We are trying to persuade the UN to give you a guarantee to meet us in another country.'"

``The Koreans also said if the UN did not agree to give the Taliban a guarantee we will come to your areas to meet. They have not done any of the above promises yet," he said.

A United Nations spokesman said the international body was ``fully supporting" efforts by the South Korean and Afghan governments to resolve the crisis.

``We are obviously aware of the unconfirmed reports suggesting that those holding the aid workers have requested our assistance to meet with the South Korean delegation at a neutral venue, but we have not been approached directly on this issue," said Dan McNorton of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Twenty-three South Koreans from a church group were kidnapped by the Taliban on July 19 while traveling from Kabul to Kandahar to work on medical and other aid projects. Two of the male hostages have been executed. Among the remaining 21 hostages, 16 are women.

The Taliban have demanded that 23 militant prisoners being held by Afghanistan and at the U.S. base at Bagram be freed in exchange for the Koreans' lives, but the Afghan government has all but ruled that option out, saying it will not allow kidnapping to become a lucrative business.

An official at the Korean Embassy in Kabul said the location of a potential meeting between the Koreans and the Taliban was not important. Asked if paying a ransom is an option, he declined to comment. He spoke on condition he not be identified in line with embassy rules.

South Korea has appealed to the United States to get more involved in the negotiation process, and the Koreans are expected to be one of the topics on the agenda of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. President George W. Bush when they meet at Camp David, Maryland, on Sunday and Monday.

Ahmadi said the Taliban have been waiting for negotiations to start and have extended many deadlines for the Koreans' lives.

If an agreement is not reached for in-person negotiations, then the Taliban will not be responsible for ``anything bad" that happens to the hostages, Ahmadi said.

Afghan heroin destined for the streets a direct threat to Canadians: Mounties

DATE: 2007.08.05

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE HEALTH INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS SOCIAL

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 714

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Bush, Karzai meet for talks to target surging violence in Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.08.05
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 749

CAMP DAVID, Md. (AP) _ President Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Sunday began a search for answers to the deteriorating security and sporadic rule of law in Afghanistan.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home _ a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed with Bush. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert and extend its authority.

Karzai arrived on a misty afternoon in the Catoctin Mountains. He was greeted by Bush and first lady Laura Bush, who led him through a cordon of Marines and Navy sailors.

Karzai chatted briefly with a few of Bush's top aides, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Robert Gates. Then he climbed in the front in Bush's local ride _ Golf Cart One _ while the first lady got in back. President Bush drove them away after wheeling the golf cart into a playful spin for the gathered media.

Ahead of his arrival, Karzai offered a reminder of the trouble that remains nearly six years after U.S. and coalition forces entered his country. In the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the United States and its allies have essentially gotten nowhere lately, Karzai said.

``We are not closer, we are not further away from it," Karzai said in an interview with CNN's ``Late Edition," which aired Sunday. ``We are where we were a few years ago."

Karzai ruled out that bin Laden was in Afghanistan, but otherwise said he didn't know where the leader of the al-Qaida terror network was likely to be hiding.

Bin Laden, the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is believed to be living in the tribal border region of Pakistan. His ability to avoid capture remains a major source of frustration for U.S.-led forces and a political sore spot for Bush.

Afghanistan's fragility remains of paramount concern to the United States.

``Karzai wants to shore up his ties in Washington," said Teresita Schaffer, a former top State Department official for south Asia. ``And I think the U.S. government very much wants to get a stronger sense of how we can develop a common political strategy."

Despite its progress since U.S.-led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness. Stability has been hindered by the lack of government order, particularly in the southern part of the country.

“The security situation in Afghanistan over the past two years has definitely deteriorated,” Karzai said in the interview. “There is no doubt about that.”

Overshadowing the Bush–Karzai meeting is the fate of 21 South Korean volunteers who were abducted by the Taliban on July 19 and are now believed to be in central Afghanistan. The captors took a total of 23 people hostage and have shot and killed two of them.

The Taliban is seeking the release of prisoners; the Afghan government has refused, and the U.S. adamantly opposes conceding to such demands. The crisis has put considerable pressure on Karzai and raised more doubts about his ability to enforce the rule of law.

Bush and Karzai are also likely to discuss Afghanistan's distrustful relationship with neighbouring Pakistan. Karzai said the flow of foreign fighters from Pakistan into his country is a concern he will address soon with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

The two are expected to meet soon as part of a gathering of tribal elders in Kabul.

Karzai said he is investigating reports that Iran is fuelling violence in Afghanistan by sending in weaponry such as sophisticated roadside bombs. Yet he also praised Iran as a partner in peace and against narcotics. “So far, Iran has been a helper,” he said.

Violence has been rising sharply in Afghanistan, led by different Taliban groups with various links to tribal leaders and residual al–Qaida forces.

As U.S. and NATO forces target Taliban insurgents, the civilian deaths associated with the attacks have enraged the Afghan population and eroded Karzai's authority. He has repeatedly asked military commanders for more caution and lashed out at foreign forces aiding his nation.

Karzai is likely to seek some reassurance from Bush that “whatever the U.S. is doing is going to result in fewer civilians killed,” said Schaffer, now the director of the South Asia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Militants often wear civilian dress and seek shelter in villagers' homes, making it hard to differentiate the enemy from the innocent. Bush “is absolutely satisfied” that the U.S. military is doing all it can avoid civilian casualties, spokesman Scott Stanzel said.

On another front, Afghanistan now accounts for 95 per cent of the world's poppy production used to make heroin, and profits from the drug trade are aiding the Taliban.

US–Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.08.05
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 124

WASHINGTON — There'll be lots to talk about today when President Bush hosts Afghan President Hamid Karzai for an overnight stay at his Camp David retreat.

Karzai has been under criticism for the resurgent Taliban and a government many say is corrupt.

But White House press secretary Tony Snow says the Bush administration feels Karzai has made great strides for Afghanistan and deserves all the help the U–S can give him.

This is the first meeting between the two leaders since last September when Bush and Karzai met with Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf.

Musharraf said at the time he'd signed a truce with Taliban leaders along the border with Afghanistan, a move Karzai opposed because he felt it would provide a safe haven for al–Qaida and Taliban fighters.

The Bush administration has since come to acknowledge Karzai was right.

(APB)

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Afghan heroin hitting our streets, Mounties warn; Proliferation of drug 'directly threatens' Canadians, two newly released federal agency reports reveal

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ILLUSTRATION: Rahmat Gul AP FILE PHOTO An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies in Bati Kot district of Nangarhar province. The country's poppy production is on the increase. ; Heroin comes from opium poppies. Rahmat Gul AP FILE PHOTO An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies in Bati Kot district of Nangarhar province. The country's poppy production is on the increase. ;

BYLINE: Steve Rennie

SOURCE: Canadian Press

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WORD COUNT: 643

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SECTION: News

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ILLUSTRATION: Rahmat Gul AP FILE PHOTO An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies in Bati Kot district of Nangarhar province. The country's poppy production is on the increase.

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The foreign affairs and defence department briefings differ on the opium production and trafficking yields in Afghanistan, estimating it is equivalent to between 25 and 60 per cent of the Afghan economy.

Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ambra Dickie said Ottawa has pledged about \$57 million to fund Afghan counter-narcotics efforts, including an \$18.5 million program to promote alternate livelihoods in the country's volatile Kandahar province, where Canadian troops are stationed.

The Afghan counter-narcotics programs are co-ordinated by that country's national drug control strategy. But the drug control strategy is badly flawed, said Thomas Pietschmann, a researcher who authored the UN drug report.

"It's clear: There is a disaster there. Nobody can say that it's working. It's not working," Pietschmann said from his office in Vienna, Austria.

Afghanistan's counter-narcotics minister stepped down last month after the country's opium poppy crop ballooned under his watch. Habibullah Qaderi's resignation came as Western embassies and the Afghan government hold meetings about how to fight the country's growing drug problem.

Pietschmann said it is "extremely logical" that there's more Afghan heroin on Canadian streets because of a spike in the central Asian nation's opium poppy production.

"It would be the most logical thing to expect, on the Canadian market, that you would see far more Afghan heroin landing on the shores of Canada," he said.

Afghanistan's swelling opium crop might lower heroin's street value in Canada, Nadeau said, adding he doubts more people will start using heroin because it's cheaper and there's more of it.

"Heroin is not what it used to be. There's a certain stigma attached to it from the user population," he said. "But it's definitely a problem in certain major centres."

The Foreign Affairs briefing concedes there's no quick fix to Afghanistan's drug quandary: "There are no simple solutions to a problem that has taken decades to develop."

At first glance, Canada doesn't seem to have a heroin problem. Less than one per cent of Canadians have used the drug at some point in their lives, according to the latest report from Health Canada and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Afghan heroin hitting our streets, Mounties warn; Proliferation of drug 'directly threatens' Canadians, two new

The RCMP says it seized 60 kilograms of heroin in Canada in 2003, 77 kilograms in 2004, and 83 kilograms in 2005.

Hunt for bin Laden stalls; Almost six years after 9/11, 'not closer ... not further' from finding him, Karzai says

IDNUMBER 200708060060
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: World And Comment
PAGE: AA02
ILLUSTRATION: MANDEL NGAN afp getty images Afghan President Hamid Karzai, centre, with U.S. President George W. Bush and Laura Bush at Camp David yesterday. Karzai and Bush are expected to discuss deteriorating security and rising violence in Afghanistan. American born Al Qaeda member Adam Gadahn threatens diplomats and embassies in a new video. American born Al Qaeda member Adam Gadahn threatens diplomats and embassies in a new video. ;
BYLINE: Ben Feller
SOURCE: Associated Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 477

In the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the United States and its allies have essentially gotten nowhere lately, says Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

"We are not closer, we are not further away from it," Karzai said ahead of his two-day summit with U.S. President George W. Bush at Camp David, Md. "We are where we were a few years ago."

Karzai ruled out that bin Laden was in Afghanistan, but otherwise said he didn't know where the leader of the Al Qaeda terror network was likely hiding.

Karzai's comments, in an interview on CNN's "Late Edition," were taped Saturday in Kabul and broadcast yesterday.

Bin Laden, the leader of the Al Qaeda network and mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is believed to be living in the tribal border region of Pakistan. His ability to avoid capture remains a major source of frustration for U.S.-led forces. Karzai arrived on a misty afternoon in the Catocin Mountains. He was greeted by Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, who led him through a cordon of U.S. Marines and Navy sailors.

Karzai chatted briefly with a few of Bush's top aides, including U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home – a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert and extend its authority. Afghanistan's fragility remains of paramount concern to the United States.

Hunt for bin Laden stalls; Almost six years after 9/11, 'not closer ... not further' from finding him, Karzai says

"Karzai wants to shore up his ties in Washington," said Teresita Schaffer, a former top State Department official for South Asia. "And I think the U.S. government very much wants to get a stronger sense of how we can develop a common political strategy."

Despite its progress since U.S.-led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness. Stability has been hindered by the lack of government order, particularly in the southern part of the country.

"The security situation in Afghanistan over the past two years has definitely deteriorated," Karzai said in the interview. "There is no doubt about that."

Bush and Karzai are also likely to discuss Afghanistan's distrustful relationship with neighbouring Pakistan. Karzai said the flow of foreign fighters from Pakistan into his country is a concern he will address soon with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

The two are expected to meet this month as part of a gathering of tribal elders in Kabul.

Meanwhile, an American member of Al Qaeda threatened foreign diplomats and embassies across the Islamic world in a new video released yesterday. In the 77-minute video, Adam Gadahn, a Californian also known as Azzan al-Amriki, calls foreign embassies "spy dens" where attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq are plotted.

The video also featured a computer-animated recreation of a March 2006 suicide attack that killed U.S. diplomat David Foy in Karachi, Pakistan, and testimony from a man who claimed to be the bomber.

Gadahn last appeared in a video in May, threatening the United States with an attack worse than 9/11.

Medicine dropped to South Korean hostages; 'Please save us,' aid workers held captive by Taliban entreat UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

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PAGE: AA02
BYLINE: Sayed Salahuddin
SOURCE: ; REUTERS NEWS AGENCY
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 332

Afghan doctors delivered medicines yesterday for 21 South Koreans kidnapped by Taliban rebels in Afghanistan more than two weeks ago.

The head of a private Afghan clinic said his team had dropped more than \$1, 200 (U.S.) worth of antibiotics, pain killers, vitamin tablets and heart pills in an area of desert in the Qarabagh district of Ghazni province as instructed by the rebels.

"This is a big achievement. Among the Koreans are doctors who know how to use these medicines," Mohammad Hashim Wahaj told reporters in Ghazni, the main town of the province where 23 South Korean church volunteers were snatched from a bus on July 20.

"It was a big risk, but we had to take the risk because it is a humanitarian issue," he said.

The Taliban have killed two of their captives and are threatening to kill the rest if the Afghan government fails to release rebel prisoners.

"Since we've not set a deadline for them, they could be killed at any moment, any time," Taliban spokesperson Yousuf Ahmadi told Agence France-Press.

Kabul has refused to free jailed Taliban, saying that would just encourage more kidnappings.

The hostage issue is likely to cast a shadow over two days of security talks between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. President George W. Bush scheduled to begin at the U.S. presidential retreat, Camp David, yesterday.

Wahaj said he had been in contact with the kidnappers who told him two of the remaining hostages were seriously ill. The Taliban were willing to free those two hostages, he said, but only if two Taliban prisoners were also freed.

The insurgents' demand for prisoners to be released has proved a sticking point in all negotiations so far.

A woman who identified herself as Lim Hyun-joo, a 32-year-old nurse and the group's guide, pleaded for help from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, himself a South Korean.

Medicine dropped to South Korean hostages; 'Please save us,' aid workers held captive by Taliban entreat UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

"Every day it's really hard to survive. We really want to go home. We are all sick and weak," she told Voice of America radio.

"We are innocent people. We came here to help the people, but now we are all sick ... Dear Mr. General Secretary Ban Ki-moon please save us ... We don't want to die."

A South Korean delegation was in Ghazni seeking face-to-face talks with the kidnappers to try to break the deadlock. But yesterday, the Taliban said there was no agreement on where to hold direct talks with the Korean diplomats.

Afghan scourge growing Heroin from poppies making its way to Canada

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PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun

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ILLUSTRATION: photo by AP An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies on a opium poppy field in Bati Kot district, east of Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghanistan accounts for 95% of the world's crop.

BYLINE: STEVE RENNIE, CP

WORD COUNT: 214

The Mounties have warned at least two federal agencies that Afghan heroin is "increasingly" making its way to Canada and poses a direct threat to the public despite millions of dollars from Ottawa to fund the war-torn country's counter-narcotics efforts, newly released documents reveal.

"The RCMP informs us that Afghan heroin is increasingly ending up on, or is destined for Canadian streets," say foreign affairs and defence department briefings, obtained separately under the Access to Information Act.

The Afghan-produced heroin "directly threatens" Canadians, the identically worded briefings say.

Paul Nadeau, the director of the RCMP's drug branch in Ottawa, said about 60% of the heroin on Canadian streets comes from Afghanistan.

"Keep in mind, though, that when we seize it, it doesn't have a stamp on it that says where it came from," he said.

Rather, it's the investigative tracing of smuggling routes that reveals the drug's country of origin.

Until a few years ago, most heroin came from an opium-producing region in Southeast Asia called the "golden triangle," a mountainous area of around 350,000 square km overlapping Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand.

In recent years, organized crime groups from Southeast Asia have taken to trafficking synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, which have more users — and more profitability — than heroin, Nadeau said.

New traffickers, who Nadeau said are often, but not always, of Indian origin, have stepped in, bringing with them new shipping methods.

The Southeast Asian traffickers were notorious for brazen heroin shipments, sometimes totalling up to 100 kilos a haul. The new traffickers typically prefer smaller, but more frequent, shipments, Nadeau said.

KEYWORDS=CANADA

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SOURCETAG: 0708060369

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 2

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KEYWORDS=CANADA

Top Afghan meets Bush Summit seeks answers to country's turmoil

SOURCETAG: 0708060012

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 3

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Charles Dharapak, AP U.S. President George W. Bush walks with Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai at Camp David, Md., yesterday. The two leaders discussed the state of Afghanistan's security.

BYLINE: BEN FELLER, AP

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, MD.

WORD COUNT: 411

President George W. Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday began a search for answers to the deteriorating security and sporadic rule of law in Afghanistan.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home — a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed with Bush. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert its authority.

Karzai chatted briefly with a few of Bush's top aides, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Robert Gates. Then he climbed in the front in Bush's local ride — Golf Cart One — while the first lady got in back. Bush drove them away after wheeling the golf cart into a playful spin for the gathered media.

Ahead of his arrival, Karzai offered a reminder of the trouble that remains nearly six years after U.S. and coalition forces entered his country. In the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the U.S. and its allies have essentially gotten nowhere lately, Karzai said.

"We are not closer, we are not further away from it," Karzai said in an interview with CNN's Late Edition, which aired yesterday. "We are where we were a few years ago."

BIN LADEN MYSTERY

Karzai ruled out that bin Laden was in Afghanistan, but otherwise said he didn't know where the leader of the al-Qaida terror network was likely to be hiding.

Bin Laden, the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is believed to be living in the tribal border region of Pakistan. His ability to avoid capture remains a major source of frustration for U.S.-led forces and a political sore spot for Bush.

Afghanistan's fragility remains of paramount concern to the U.S.

"Karzai wants to shore up his ties in Washington," said Teresita Schaffer, a former top State Department official for south Asia. "And I think the U.S. government very much wants to get a stronger sense of how we can develop a common political strategy."

Despite its progress since U.S.-led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness. Stability has been hindered by the lack of government order, particularly in the southern part of the country.

"The security situation in Afghanistan over the past two years has definitely deteriorated," Karzai said in the interview. "There is no doubt about that."

Overshadowing the Bush-Karzai meeting is the fate of 21 South Korean volunteers who were abducted by the Taliban on July 19.

Bush and Karzai are also likely to discuss Afghanistan's distrustful relationship with neighbouring Pakistan. Karzai said the flow of foreign fighters from Pakistan into his country is a concern he will address soon with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Afghan scourge growing Heroin from poppies making its way to Canada

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 2

ILLUSTRATION: photo by AP An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies on a opium poppy field in Bati Kot district, east of Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghanistan accounts for 95% of the world's crop.

BYLINE: STEVE RENNIE, CP

WORD COUNT: 214

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The Afghan-produced heroin "directly threatens" Canadians, the identically worded briefings say.

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Rather, it's the investigative tracing of smuggling routes that reveals the drug's country of origin.

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In recent years, organized crime groups from Southeast Asia have taken to trafficking synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, which have more users — and more profitability — than heroin, Nadeau said.

New traffickers, who Nadeau said are often, but not always, of Indian origin, have stepped in, bringing with them new shipping methods.

The Southeast Asian traffickers were notorious for brazen heroin shipments, sometimes totalling up to 100 kilos a haul. The new traffickers typically prefer smaller, but more frequent, shipments, Nadeau said.

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Bush, Karzai meet on strategy

SOURCETAG 0708060236

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A6

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Reuters GOLF CART ONE: U.S. President George W. Bush takes Hamid Karzai for a spin in a golf cart after the Afghan president's arrival at the presidential retreat in Camp David yesterday.

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, MD.

WORD COUNT: 369

U.S. President George W. Bush and his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai, yesterday began a search for answers to the deteriorating security and sporadic rule of law in Afghanistan.

Karzai's two-day visit to Bush's mountain retreat comes as he faces competing troubles at home — a hostage crisis, civilian killings, drug trafficking and a resurgent Taliban.

All of those matters are likely to be discussed with Bush. The U.S. president is looking to bolster Karzai but also to prod his government to exert and extend its authority.

Karzai arrived on a misty afternoon in the Catoctin Mountains. He was greeted by Bush and first lady Laura Bush, who led him through a cordon of marines and navy sailors.

Karzai chatted briefly with a few of Bush's top aides, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Robert Gates. Then he climbed in the front in Bush's local ride — Golf Cart One — while the first lady got in back. President Bush drove them away after wheeling the golf cart into a playful spin for the gathered media.

Ahead of his arrival, Karzai offered a reminder of the trouble that remains nearly six years after U.S. and coalition forces entered his country. In the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the United States and its allies have essentially gotten nowhere lately, Karzai said.

"We are not closer, we are not further away from it," Karzai said in an interview with CNN's Late Edition, which aired yesterday. "We are where we were a few years ago."

Karzai ruled out that bin Laden was in Afghanistan, but otherwise said he didn't know where the leader of the al-Qaida terror network was likely to be hiding.

Bin Laden, the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is believed to be living in the tribal border region of Pakistan. His ability to avoid capture remains a major source of frustration for U.S.-led forces and a political sore spot for Bush.

Afghanistan's fragility remains of paramount concern to the United States.

"Karzai wants to shore up his ties in Washington," said Teresita Schaffer, a former top State Department official for south Asia. "And I think the U.S. government very much wants to get a stronger sense of how we can develop a common political strategy."

Despite its progress since U.S.-led forces toppled the militant Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan still is dominated by poverty and lawlessness. Stability has been hindered by the lack of government order.

"The security situation in Afghanistan over the past two years has definitely deteriorated," Karzai said.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

South Korea negotiating Taliban meeting

SOURCETAG 0708060232
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
COLUMN: World Digest
WORD COUNT: 138

As the Taliban and South Korean officials negotiated a possible face-to-face meeting, a South Korean diplomat in Afghanistan spoke by telephone with one of the 21 captives being held by the militant group, an official said today. The Foreign Ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity, declined to give further details about the conversation, citing safety concerns. The Taliban have agreed to meet face-to-face with a South Korean delegation, but have not agreed on a venue. A purported Taliban spokesperson expressed concerns that militants could be detained by the Afghan military and proposed either a meeting in Taliban territory or a United Nations-hosted meeting elsewhere.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

American al-Qaida member releases video

SOURCETAG 0708060231
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
DATELINE: CAIRO
COLUMN: World Digest
WORD COUNT: 159

An American member of al-Qaida is threatening foreign diplomats and embassies across the Islamic world in a new video released yesterday. In the one hour, 17 minute video, Adam Gadahn, a Californian also known as Azzan al-Amriki, calls foreign embassies "spy dens" where attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq are plotted. The video also featured a computer-animated recreation of a March 2006 suicide attack that killed U.S. diplomat David Foy in Karachi, Pakistan, and testimony from a man who claimed to be the bomber. Gadahn was charged with treason in the United States last fall and has been wanted since 2004 by the FBI, which is offering a US\$1 million reward for information leading to his arrest or conviction. He last appeared in a video in May, threatening the United States. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Speaking up for Korean hostages City lawyer calls for prayer

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PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

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SECTION: News

PAGE: 5

ILLUSTRATION: photo by David Bloom, Sun Media Elvis and Twyla Iginla show an ad they placed in the Sun yesterday asking people to pray for Korean hostages in Afghanistan.

BYLINE: NICKI THOMAS, SPECIAL TO SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 246

Edmonton lawyer Elvis Iginla is asking the public to pray for Korean hostages being held in Afghanistan.

In a multi-lined ad placed in yesterday's Edmonton Sun on behalf of himself and his wife Twyla, Iginla wrote: "Please pray for these people and for their families ... Pray that God will intervene and spare their lives."

The father of Calgary Flames star right-winger Jarome Iginla said he was moved to send the public message because he finds the most recent hostage situation in Afghanistan "particularly painful."

He said the hostages went to the wartorn country to provide food, medicine and other basic needs but are now being used as pawns by their captors.

"The only reason they're there is to help those people," said Iginla, adding that the captors took advantage of the hostages' sense of goodwill.

He added that as a father of five he feels empathy for the hostages' parents, who nervously await news of their children's fate.

"Two families have already had to bury their sons. One of the mothers of these hostages has offered to take the place of her daughter," he wrote.

Iginla said that as a Christian, he believes in the power of prayer and he hopes that somehow, his gesture will help.

"If I really thought I could go there and get them out, I would. I feel that passionate about it," he said.

He said he doesn't have an opinion about Canada's presence in Afghanistan because the country is stuck "between a rock and a hard place."

As a Christian, he doesn't believe in violence.

But the situation in Afghanistan under the Taliban, especially with regards to the treatment of women, necessitated intervention, he said.

"How do you stand back and allow that to continue?" he asked.

Iginla called those keeping the 21 remaining hostages, "children of God," and asked people to pray that "they will quickly learn to replace hate with love and savagery with compassion."

Two of the original 23 hostages were killed and South Korea is pressing the U.S. and Afghanistan to do all they can to negotiate a release of the surviving captives. KEYWORDS=ALBERTA

Afghan scourge growing Heroin from poppies making its way to Canada

SOURCETAG: 0708060524

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 2

ILLUSTRATION: photo by AP An Afghan farmer collects resin from poppies on an opium poppy field in Bati Kot district, east of Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghanistan accounts for 95% of the world's crop.

BYLINE: STEVE RENNIE, CP

WORD COUNT: 214

The Mounties have warned at least two federal agencies that Afghan heroin is "increasingly" making its way to Canada and poses a direct threat to the public despite millions of dollars from Ottawa to fund the war-torn country's counter-narcotics efforts, newly released documents reveal.

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Iginla's dad makes war plea Father places ad for public to pray for Korean hostages held in Afghanistan

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: photo of JAROME IGINLA Father prays for hostages
BYLINE: NICKI THOMAS, SUN MEDIA
WORD COUNT: 243

The father of Calgary Flames sharpshooter Jarome Iginla is asking the public to pray for Korean hostages being held in Afghanistan.

In a multi-line ad placed in yesterday's Edmonton Sun on behalf of himself, Elvis and his wife Twlya, Iginla wrote: "Please pray for these people and for their families. ... Pray that God will intervene and spare their lives."

The elder Iginla said he was moved to send the public message because he finds the most recent hostage situation in Afghanistan "particularly painful."

Jarome Iginla, 30, inked a new contract with the Flames earlier this summer, keeping him tied to the National Hockey League club through for another five years.

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"The only reason they're there is to help those people," said dad Iginla, adding the captors took advantage of the hostages' sense of good will.

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SOURCETAG: 0708060450

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 2

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In recent years, organized crime groups from Southeast Asia have taken to trafficking synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, which have more users — and more profitability — than heroin, Nadeau said.

New traffickers, who Nadeau said are often, but not always, of Indian origin, have stepped in, bringing with them new shipping methods.

The Southeast Asian traffickers were notorious for brazen heroin shipments, sometimes totalling up to 100 kilos a haul. The new traffickers typically prefer smaller, but more frequent, shipments, Nadeau said.

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Dumping O'Connor from Defence portfolio is the easy part; Embattled minister's ineffectiveness will trigger cabinet shuffle soon, but finding right replacement not so simple

IDNUMBER 200708060051
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A18
BYLINE: L. Ian MacDonald
SOURCE: Freelance
WORD COUNT: 747

We're now in August, and to mark the official start of the silly season, here's the first of many offerings on a cabinet shuffle in Ottawa.

Why? Because it's August, and that's reason enough. There's another reason — Gordon O'Connor. He's a cabinet shuffle waiting to happen. And here's the fun part — while only Stephen Harper can make it happen, everyone gets a free kick at the can.

After his encounter with the media at the Conservative caucus in Charlottetown on Wednesday, O'Connor's effectiveness as defence minister is pretty much kaput. For his own sake, as well as for the sake of the mission in Afghanistan, he needs to be taken off the firing line. He has become the story, or rather, the space between Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff, and O'Connor, the defence minister, has become the story. Thursday's Globe and Mail headline, "O'Connor insists he and Hillier of like mind," pretty much makes this point.

There comes a time when perception is reality, and the perception of cleavage between the defence minister and his top general has become reality.

When O'Connor tried to blow it off as media hype, insisting "it's the way you interpret our words," that became the story, too. The media have pegged him as an easy mark. How the media breached the wall of the Conservative party's private caucus space is immaterial. They were looking for a story and found one in O'Connor. Have a nice day.

When a minister becomes the story, a storm is usually survivable. When he becomes the issue, it isn't. Beyond a certain point, the only way to change the message track is to change the messenger. Such was the case with Rona Ambrose in Environment last January, when John Baird was brought in as the relief. A tough file needed a strong communicator who knew the hard rules of the political game, and Baird has served that purpose.

And so O'Connor figures to become the trigger of a summer cabinet shuffle. And trigger is the word for it. The thing about a cabinet shuffle is that all the pieces have to fit together, and only the prime minister has all the pieces. If someone is being moved, as opposed to being dumped, there has to be a place for him. More important, there has to be someone to replace him and, unless that someone is being promoted from the backbench, someone to replace the replacement.

Dumping O'Connor from Defence portfolio is the easy part; Embattled minister's ineffectiveness will trigger c

Assuming that Harper decides to ease O'Connor out of defence but keep him in cabinet, there are several places he could land, such as Veterans Affairs, where as a retired brigadier he could bring a lot of knowledge to files in a key Tory demographic.

Or, as an Ottawa-area MP, he might be a good fit at Treasury Board, which could be viewed as a lateral shuffle rather than a demotion. Problem is, there are already people in those jobs, Greg Thompson at Veterans Affairs and Vic Toews at Treasury Board.

But who would be the new defence minister? Someone who could manage the mission in Afghanistan, and sell it.

Here's a prospective short list:

Peter MacKay. He's currently minister of foreign affairs, is also senior minister for the Atlantic, and has important defence bases in his region, notably the navy in Halifax and the army at Gagetown, N.B. He also looks good in a helmet and flak jacket.

But after a shaky start at Foreign Affairs last year, he has worked hard to learn an array of complex files, and has networked with other foreign affairs ministers from Washington to Jerusalem.

In moving him to Defence, Harper would be giving up what MacKay has learned at Foreign Affairs. And who would move to Foreign Affairs?

See? It's not that easy.

Maxime Bernier. No doubt about it, he's the rising star from Quebec. He's telegenic. He gives good sound bite in both languages. He drives the Bloc Quebecois crazy in the House. He would be an articulate advocate for Afghanistan in Quebec, at a time when Quebec's Van Doos are the relief in Kandahar.

Yet Bernier is also managing important files as industry minister, including competition policy and new telecom platforms.

Jim Prentice. Here's the guy, Harper's go-to guy as chairman of the cabinet operations committee, chief operating officer of the government.

As minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, he's also managed to win the respect of stakeholders while changing expectations in a very sensitive portfolio. He's thoughtful, he's discreet, and known for having the best staff on Parliament Hill. Managing the mission, not his relationship with Hillier, would be the story.

So, prime minister, think about it. There are only four weeks left in August.

L. Ian Macdonald is a Montreal writer and former staffer in the Prime Minister's Office in the Mulroney years.

Dumping O'Connor from Defence portfolio is the easy part; Embattled minister's ineffectiveness will trigger a

Bush, Karzai meet to discuss Taliban threats; Afghan president raises eyebrows by touting friendship with Iran

IDNUMBER 200708060031
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Karzai;
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; NOBEL PRIZE; IRAN; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, Maryland
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 414

CAMP DAVID, Maryland – Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Sunday began talks with U.S. President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in his country after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Ahead of talks expected to cover the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan, Karzai, one of Bush's key allies, also revealed that attempts to track down terror mastermind Osama bin Laden had shown no progress in years.

The drug trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban were also likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions at the Camp David presidential retreat.

But Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

In an interview broadcast Sunday on CNN, Karzai appeared to turn back U.S. allegations that Iranian arms were helping to erode the security situation in Afghanistan. "So far, Iran has been a helper and a solution," he said.

"Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan, in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan," Karzai said in the interview conducted Saturday.

He went on to say that Afghanistan and Iran had "very, very good, very, very close relations. ... We will continue to have good relations with Iran. We will continue to resolve issues, if there are any, to arise."

His remarks differed markedly from the U.S. stance, which sees Iran as a major menace that bankrolls terrorists, supplies arms to insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeks to develop nuclear weapons.

The U.S. position was reiterated Sunday by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as she defended the U.S. decision to sell tens of billions of dollars in arms to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to thwart Iranian ambitions.

"I don't think anybody doubts that Iran constitutes a major challenge, security challenge, to our friends, our allies, and therefore to our interests in the Gulf region," Rice told CBS television.

U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who just returned from a Middle East swing with Rice, offered in response to Karzai's comments that Iran was "playing both sides of the street in Afghanistan."

"I think they're doing some things to help the Afghan government," Gates told CNN. "I think they're also doing things to help the Taliban, including providing weapons."

The White House said the two presidents would discuss the war on terror and "review their work together to enhance Afghanistan's long-term democracy, prosperity, and security."

The best (and only) golf course in Afghanistan; Kabul Golf Club a 5,614-yard analogy of this wartorn country

IDNUMBER 200708060007

PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A2

COLUMN: Don Martin

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Windsor Star, CanWest News Service, File / MuhammadAfzal Abdul, head professional at Afganistan's only golf course, the Kabul Golf Club, fires one down the middle on the opening hole, a daunting 371-yard Par 4 with a 100-foot elevation drop to the green. Abdul has been imprisoned twice for his love of golf — first by the Soviets and then the Taliban. ;

KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=KABUL, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Don Martin

SOURCE: Calgary Herald

WORD COUNT: 682

KABUL, Afghanistan – The blast of a far-off bomb hit in the middle of my backswing. That might be grounds to run for cover or at least claim a mulligan on Canadian golf courses, but this being Kabul and having my iron shot go further than its pathetically-short normal, I opted to play on.

Billed as "the best and only golf course in Afghanistan," the Kabul Golf Course has been declared free of landmines and boasts of freshly-oiled greens made from pressed sand.

But if you're like me, stranded here by exit visa problems and bureaucratic foot-dragging for a sixth day, even golf played on rock-hard dirt fairways with thistle-like weeds for ground cover is a slice of pretend-you're-home heaven.

It is a surreal experience, almost worth the outrageous \$25 US greens fee, if only to say you've played one the world's truly horrible courses.

Yet this strange oft-bombed course is arguably a 5,614-yard analogy of Afghanistan, accurately reflecting the country's political stability or, more often than not, instability.

It opened in the early 1970s when Afghanistan was last in a semi-calm state, but closed six years later as the Communists came to power backed by the Soviet military. It reopened after the Soviets retreated, only to be forcibly closed down four years later when the Taliban formed a government.

The original pro shop was bombed by the Taliban and never repaired. Open ditches still bisect the course as a reminder of the Taliban's destruction of the underground irrigation system.

The local golf pro, Muhammad Abdul, was thrown in jail by the Taliban for a couple months in the late 1990s, his trophies seized and destroyed on the grounds that golf was the past-time of idle infidels and

The best (and only) golf course in Afghanistan; Kabul Golf Club a 5,614-yard analogy of this wartorn country

helping foreigners improve their game was sinfully anti-Islamic.

After the Taliban were vanquished from power in 2001 to become the insurgency being fought by Canadian soldiers today, the course reopened under Afghanistan government ownership.

The first item of business was to remove three bombed Soviet tanks and the remnants of a troop carrier cluttering the fairway, which would be considered a lateral hazard if struck by a wayward ball.

Then the fairways were subjected to a U.S.–

financed mine–removal training project to clear away nasty surprises that could turn the search for a misplayed ball into a life–ending misstep.

Today, the rusty main gate hangs off its hinges and a police station strafed with bullet holes guards the entrance.

After driving a road that runs down the middle of the first fairway to the parking lot, you wake up a clubhouse manager napping under a tree, who groggily refuses to dicker on the high price to play a round of what the scorecard claims is "golf with attitude."

A contest among half a dozen teenagers to serve as caddy ensues, the winner being Ahmad, a high school graduate who plans to attend university to become a teacher. He shot an even–par on the course earlier this year and boasts a five handicap, which means he's a scratch golfer and PGA contender on any other golf course in the world.

He's a dream caddy too, dutifully teeing up every shot by pounding a bent plastic tee into the ground using his fist. He sings your praises after even the most badly hooked drive. He pretends not to understand that gimmies count on the scorecard. And just before the moment to pay him arrived, he declared that I was the best foreign golfer to ever grace the course. The suggested \$5 caddy fee immediately became \$10.

But there are unique complications to playing the game, Kabul style.

Like the ant colonies surfacing on the "green." Or having your approach to the sixth hole require a shot over the roof of the police station, which I managed to hit with a mud–loosening well–struck eight iron. Or, after bringing along your translator for his first–ever golfing experience, he thinks part of his job is to carve a shallow trench into the sand to guide your ball into the hole.

In the end, as I signed off a mostly–bogus 42 score after nine holes, one thought kept running through my mind: I'll never play this course again.

Nah. Just kidding. I was thinking that only in Afghanistan could just having a golf course to play, even if the only one in the country resembles a goat track under construction, be the scorecard to a nation's political health.

Perhaps it's a hopeful sign that stability will become par for the course.

THE AFGHAN MISSION Learning the ropes in a land of tradition Newly arrived Vandoos must balance security concerns against possibility of alienating local population

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072180136

DATE: 2007.08.06

PAGE: A8 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALEX DEBROTA

SECTION: International News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN

WORDS: 828

WORD COUNT: 789

ALEX DEBROTA ARGHANDAB VALLEY, AFGHANISTAN The column of soldiers made its way swiftly around the mud-thatched huts, armed with rocket launchers and a medium-calibre machine gun, intent on clearing the village of any Islamic extremists that might be hiding there.

Instead, the soldiers of B Company of the Royal 22nd regiment found a line of village elders shouting and wielding sickles.

"We don't want to see you in our houses," hollered one village elder, addressing the troops through an interpreter hired by the Canadian Forces. "We have women inside. We are poor people. There is no Taliban, no rockets, no mines." That day, as in the previous three days of patrols along the Arghandab River Valley north of Kandahar, the soldiers of B Company fired not a shot, saw no insurgents and no explosive devices.

But neither did they search a house or any car carrying burka-clad Afghan women. The soldiers found themselves mired in another type of confrontation – one that has bedevilled Canada's efforts in Afghanistan and one that pits liberal-minded Western values against the conservative traditions of Kandahar province.

Fresh from Quebec to replace the troops of the Royal Canadian Regiment and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the regiment – popularly known in Canada as the Vandoos – is learning the hard lessons of Afghanistan. Among those lessons is the need to balance security concerns against the very real possibility of alienating local people and thereby enlarging the recruitment pool for the Taliban.

Even with weeks of training, many soldiers find that balancing act a challenge.

"It doesn't help us, having to deal with all of their traditions," said Master Corporal Samuel Gauthier. He is a veteran of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is a country with a large Muslim population. "It jams sticks in our wheels." Perhaps nowhere was the cultural clash more evident in recent days than at a joint checkpoint the soldiers set up on Saturday with the Afghan National Police. The Vandoos had intended to screen all cars for weapons or explosives that were possibly destined for insurgents in the Kandahar area.

"We'll do this as a customs check," a confident Lieutenant Jocelyn Demetre told his troops.

THE AFGHAN MISSION Learning the ropes in a land of tradition Newly arrived Vandoos must balance security

But his plan promptly ran afoul of Afghan National Police sector commander, Mahman Qasim, 25, who joined the force shortly after the U.S. invasion in 2002 and quickly rose through the ranks.

"We are Afghans," Mr. Qasim said proudly. "We object to you screening the cars carrying women. If you make people angry, they will side with the Taliban." The Taliban are known to smuggle explosives into the Kandahar City area along that road. Two weeks ago, Taliban fighters ambushed an Afghan police checkpoint and killed several officers.

Still, Lt. Demetre weighed the opposing challenges and grudgingly relented; his men did not search cars that contained women. A female soldier from another unit of Company B was later called to the scene, and she briefly screened a few cars under the surprised gaze of locals, amazed to see a woman in uniform.

Mr. Qasim later acknowledged that the Taliban use cars carrying women to transport arms and explosives, but said that he can't do anything about it.

It was also on Saturday that the Vandoos emerged from the air-conditioned intimacy of their light armoured vehicles, where many of them pore over men's magazines, to face the angry villagers wielding sickles.

There again, Lt. Demetre relented and instructed his soldiers not to enter any homes. They quickly patrolled the dirt lanes and shook the village elders' hands. Lt. Demetre listened to their requests – mainly for help in building wells, an invaluable asset in this arid region – before reboarding the LAVs.

Lt. Demetre later deemed both the village patrol and the checkpoint a success.

"It's these same people who can plant an IED," he said. "And we were welcomed around here so far." But his confidence in the local lore was dealt a blow yesterday in a conversation with his interpreter, a local Kandahari. In a half-joking manner, Lt. Demetre asked the man, who is known only as Jake, whether he believes that suicide bombers will go to heaven and marry seven virgins.

Not suicide bombers who attack Canadian troops, the man answered, avoiding the question. "You didn't destroy our mosques, you didn't enter into our houses and you didn't stop us from praying," said Jake, who supports the Canadian mission and dreams of one day immigrating to Canada.

"But if we did stop you from praying?" asked Lt. Demetre.

"Then there would be a jihad . Then, even somebody like me could do something like that," came the decided answer. And in that case, yes, he would go to heaven and marry seven virgins, Jake said.

"That made me reflect a bit," Lt. Demetre said. "After all, we are here to make sure nothing like this lands on our doorstep. We're here to protect our values."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; defence; internal security; social structure

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces; Taliban

THE AFGHAN MISSION Learning the ropes in a land of tradition Newly arrived Vandoos must balance secu

COUNTERNARCOTICS RCMP warn of heroin threat

Drug produced in Afghanistan 'increasingly ending up' in Canada, documents reveal

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072180135

DATE: 2007.08.06

PAGE: A6 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: STEVE RENNIE

SECTION: National News

SOURCE: CP

EDITION: National

DATELINE:

WORDS: 591

WORD COUNT: 555

STEVE RENNIE Canadian Press The Mounties have warned at least two federal agencies that Afghan heroin is "increasingly" making its way to Canada and poses a direct threat to the public despite millions of dollars from Ottawa to fund the war-torn country's counternarcotics efforts, newly released documents reveal.

"The RCMP informs us that Afghan heroin is increasingly ending up on, or is destined for Canadian streets," say Foreign Affairs and Defence Department briefings, obtained separately by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

The Afghan-produced heroin "directly threatens" Canadians, say the identically worded briefings.

Paul Nadeau, the director of the RCMP's drug branch in Ottawa, said about 60 per cent of the heroin on Canadian streets comes from Afghanistan.

"Keep in mind, though, that when we seize it, it doesn't have a stamp on it that says where it came from," he said.

Rather, it's the investigative tracing of smuggling routes that reveals the drug's country of origin.

Until a few years ago, most heroin came from an opium-producing region in Southeast Asia called the "golden triangle," a mountainous area of around 350,000 square kilometres overlapping Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand.

In recent years, organized crime groups from Southeast Asia have taken to trafficking synthetic drugs, such as ecstasy, which have more users – and more profitability – than heroin, Mr. Nadeau said.

New traffickers, who Mr. Nadeau said are often, but not always, of Indian origin, have stepped in, bringing with them new shipping methods.

The Southeast Asian traffickers were notorious for brazen heroin shipments, sometimes totalling up to 100 kilograms a haul. The new traffickers typically prefer smaller, but more frequent, shipments, Mr. Nadeau said. The strategy, it seems, is akin to throwing as much as possible against the wall to see what sticks.

"It seems to be involving the classic couriers, suitcases at the airport; smaller amounts but, no doubt, more shipments coming in," he said.

Roughly 92 per cent of the world's heroin comes from opium poppies grown in Afghanistan, according to the 2007 World Drug Report, released in June by the United Nations Office on Drugs.

Afghan heroin typically flows into Canada through two main trafficking arteries, Mr. Nadeau said: via the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and then on to India and, finally, Canada; and, from Afghanistan to western Africa, then through the United States into Canada.

The Foreign Affairs and Defence Department briefings differ on the windfall that opium production and trafficking yields in Afghanistan, estimating it is equivalent to between 25 and 60 per cent of the Afghan economy.

Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Ambra Dickie said Ottawa has pledged about \$57-million to fund Afghan counternarcotics efforts, including an \$18.5-million program to promote alternate livelihoods in the country's volatile Kandahar province, where Canadian troops are stationed.

Afghanistan's swelling opium crop might lower heroin's street value in Canada, Mr. Nadeau said, adding he doubts more people will start using heroin because it's cheaper and there's more of it.

"Heroin is not what it used to be. There's a certain stigma attached to it from the user population," he said. "But it's definitely a problem in certain major centres." The Foreign Affairs briefing concedes there's no quick fix to Afghanistan's drug quandary: "There are no simple solutions to a problem that has taken decades to develop." The RCMP says it seized 60 kilograms of heroin in Canada in 2003, 77 kilograms in 2004, and 83 kilograms in 2005.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM:illegal drugs; smuggling; heroin; statistics

SECURITY Karzai praises Iran before talks with Bush

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072180134

DATE: 2007.08.06

PAGE: A8

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AFP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, MD.

WORDS: 377

WORD COUNT: 375

Agence France–Presse CAMP DAVID, MD.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrived here yesterday for talks with President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in his country after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Mr. Bush welcomed Mr. Karzai, one of his key allies, at the Camp David presidential retreat where they were expected to confer over the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The drug trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban were also likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions.

But Mr. Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

In an interview broadcast yesterday on CNN, Mr. Karzai appeared to turn back U.S. allegations that Iranian arms were helping to erode the security situation in Afghanistan. "So far, Iran has been a helper and a solution," he said.

"Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan, in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan," Mr. Karzai said in the interview conducted Saturday.

He went on to say that Afghanistan and Iran had "very, very good, very, very close relations. . . . We will continue to have good relations with Iran. We will continue to resolve issues, if there are any to arise." His remarks differed markedly from the U.S. stand, which sees Iran as a major menace that bankrolls terrorists, supplies arms to insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeks to develop nuclear weapons.

U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates, just returned from a Middle East swing, offered in response to Mr. Karzai's comments the observation that Iran was "playing both sides of the street in Afghanistan." "I think they're doing some things to help the Afghan government," Mr. Gates told CNN. "I think they're also doing things to help the Taliban, including providing weapons." The White House earlier said Mr. Bush and Mr. Karzai would discuss Washington's war on terrorism and "review their work together to enhance Afghanistan's long-term democracy, prosperity, and security."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: United States; Afghanistan; Iran

SUBJECT TERM: visits; foreign policy; internal security; strife; statements

PERSONAL NAME: Hamid Karzai

UNITED NATIONS Late to Darfur's rescue

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072180098

DATE: 2007.08.06

PAGE: A10

BYLINE:

SECTION: Editorial

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 508

WORD COUNT: 535

As a test of the world's "responsibility to protect," Darfur has been a miserable failure.

For four years the people of Darfur have been murdered and raped by the militias backed by the government of Sudan, and the world has been unwilling to stop the violence. Last week, the United Nations, having at last obtained the consent of Sudan, passed a resolution to send in a large, African-led peacekeeping force. It is good news that a meaningful intervention is on its way; many lives remain to be saved. But the UN did not live up to the responsibility proposed by Canada and others in 2001 and accepted by the world body two years ago.

The UN resolution, co-sponsored by Britain and France, has some teeth and some gaps. Assuming that the world anted up enough soldiers (mostly from Africa and the Middle East, since Canada, the United States and Europe are tied up in Afghanistan and Iraq), the force is to have nearly 20,000 soldiers and more than 6,000 police. The African Union contingent of 7,000 already in Darfur will be folded into this joint UN-AU mission, to be up and running by the end of the year.

This should not be an impotent group of soldiers on perpetual standby, as was the case with UN peacekeepers in Rwanda under the command of Canadian general Romeo Dallaire. Resolution 1769 authorizes the peacekeepers to "take the necessary action" to protect their own personnel and the freedom of movement of aid workers, to prevent a peace agreement from being disrupted, and to protect civilians.

It is unfortunate, however, that the peacekeepers have no power to disarm the janjaweed ("evil men on horseback") militia. Amnesty International has raised concerns that the force can only monitor arms in Darfur, and that the Islamist government of Sudan will try to obstruct the UN-AU force.

Sovereignty is not absolute. The responsibility to protect is based on the idea that, in extreme cases, an international duty to save civilians trumps the sovereign rights of states. Darfur is an extreme case. At least 200,000 civilians have died and more than two million (out of a population of six million) have been displaced. Whether there was genocidal intent or not is irrelevant.

"There is a collective international responsibility to protect," a report commissioned by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan in 2004 said, "exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort in the event of genocide and other large-scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of international humanitarian law which sovereign governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent." But the collective responsibility became tangled up in the machinery of the United Nations, in part because China, a Security Council member and a major importer of Sudan's oil, opposed the intervention.

The worst human suffering in recent times has sprung from civil war and ethnic conflict rather than battles between nations, and the world has had no ready response to it.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Darfur; Sudan

SUBJECT TERM:human rights; strife; peacekeeping forces

ORGANIZATION NAME: African Union

The doctor's story

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL
IDN: 072180072
DATE: 2007.08.06
PAGE: A10
BYLINE: HARRY BERBRAYER
SECTION: Letter to the Edit
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: Duncan, B.C.
WORDS: 110
WORD COUNT: 121

Harry Berbrayer Duncan, B.C.

So, Kevin Patterson, who recently served as a physician with Canadian troops in Afghanistan, has written an article about the gruesome death of Nova Scotia Corporal Kevin Megeney (Doctor's Gory Tale Angers Soldier's Family, Aug. 4). And because some family, friends, and colleagues are offended by the detail provided to us, Dr. Patterson is now the target of criticism, abusive commentary and an investigation by the Department of National Defence.

I say kudos to Dr. Patterson. It took courage for him to work in Kandahar, and courage to write of his experiences. I commend any efforts to reveal as a lie the romantic, sanitized picture of this war.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; war; deaths; privacy

PERSONAL NAME: Kevin Patterson; Kevin Megeney

The doctor's story

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072180065

DATE: 2007.08.06

PAGE: A10

BYLINE: ANNE COLLINS

SECTION: Letter to the Edit

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 105

WORD COUNT: 129

Anne Collins publisher, Random House Canada Yes, it is hard to bear the reality Dr. Patterson describes so eloquently, but his account of Cpl. Megeny's tragic death honours the soldier's last moments and the efforts of the medical staff to save his life.

In the Mother Jones article and in the upcoming anthology, *Outside the Wire* , in which Dr. Patterson and co-editor Jane Warren have collected first-person accounts of the war from soldiers, aid workers and medical personnel, Dr. Patterson is helping to tell a story we need to know. That story describes the true nature of this war and its transfiguring effects, both noble and horrifying.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; war; deaths; privacy

PERSONAL NAME: Kevin Patterson; Kevin Megeney

Bush–Karzai talks off to rocky start; Comments about 'helper' Iran draw fire from U.S.

IDNUMBER 200708060030

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.08.06

EDITION: Early

SECTION: News

PAGE: A7

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Larry Downing, Reuters / Afghan President Hamid Karzai, right, began his visit with George W. Bush yesterday by calling U.S. nemesis Iran 'a helper and a solution.' ;

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, Maryland

SOURCE: Agence France–Presse; with a file from Reuters

WORD COUNT: 468

CAMP DAVID, Maryland – Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrived here yesterday for talks with U.S. President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Mr. Bush welcomed Mr. Karzai, one of his key allies, at the Camp David presidential retreat where they were expected to confer over the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The drug trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban were also likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions, as news that doctors successfully delivered medicines to the hostages yesterday was met with relief from a private Afghan clinic that orchestrated the deal with the kidnappers.

Mr. Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

In an interview broadcast yesterday on CNN, Mr. Karzai appeared to turn back U.S. allegations that Iranian arms were helping to erode the security situation in Afghanistan. "So far, Iran has been a helper and a solution," he said.

"Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan, in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan," Mr. Karzai said in the interview on Saturday.

He went on to say that Afghanistan and Iran had "very, very good, very, very close relations. ... We will continue to have good relations with Iran. We will continue to resolve issues, if there are any, to arise."

His remarks differed markedly from the U.S. stance, which sees Iran as a major menace that bankrolls terrorists, supplies arms to insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeks to develop nuclear weapons.

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"I don't think anybody doubts that Iran constitutes a major challenge, security challenge, to our friends, our allies, and therefore to our interests in the Gulf region," Ms. Rice told CBS television.

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The White House earlier said Mr. Bush and Mr. Karzai would discuss Washington's war on terrorism and Afghanistan's "long-term democracy, prosperity, and security."

Mr. Karzai also indicated that security forces were no closer than they were a few years ago to finding Osama bin Laden, the elusive chief of the al-Qaeda network.

"We are not closer, we are not further away from it. We are where we were a few years ago," Mr. Karzai said.

Bush–Karzai talks off to rocky start; Comments about 'helper' Iran draw fire from U.S.

IDNUMBER 200708060025

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.08.06

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A7

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Larry Downing, Reuters / Afghan President Hamid Karzai, right, began his visit with George W. Bush yesterday by calling U.S. nemesis Iran 'a helper and a solution.' ;

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, Maryland

SOURCE: Agence France–Presse; with a file from Reuters

WORD COUNT: 466

CAMP DAVID, Maryland – Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday began talks with President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in his country after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Mr. Bush welcomed Mr. Karzai, one of his key allies, at the Camp David presidential retreat where they were expected to confer over the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The drug trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban were also likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions, as news that doctors successfully delivered medicines to the hostages yesterday was met with relief from a private Afghan clinic that orchestrated the deal with the kidnappers.

Mr. Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

In an interview broadcast yesterday on CNN, Mr. Karzai appeared to turn back U.S. allegations that Iranian arms were helping to erode the security situation in Afghanistan. "So far, Iran has been a helper and a solution," he said.

"Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan, in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan," Mr. Karzai said in the interview on Saturday.

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Why Afghanistan is on a road to anarchy

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A2
COLUMN: Monday Morning
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: 'By ignoring Afghanistan, I would say the western countries are watering the roots of the Banyan tree of terrorism. Its roots are very firm and widely spread,' says Ved Pratap Vaidik, a prominent India-born political analyst. ;
BYLINE: Donna Jacobs
SOURCE: Citizen Special
WORD COUNT: 1218

If western military forces pull out of Afghanistan too soon, says a friend of Mohammed Zaher Shah, the country's aged last king who died on July 23, "the situation might explode in such a manner that you'll have many 9/11s all over the world."

A premature exit will mean "a big disaster" in Afghanistan, says Ved Pratap Vaidik, a scholar whose lifelong study of Afghanistan developed into a 40-year friendship with the king. "Anarchy will prevail in cities and the lives of western soldiers will be in great danger. The country may be divided into several independent territories."

He says the West needs to "shell out" to Afghanistan one-tenth of the resources it gives to Iraq. Afghanistan needs \$30 billion to \$40 billion U.S. — five times the current aid commitments. "It's peanuts for the Americans and their allies."

"By ignoring Afghanistan, I would say the western countries are watering the roots of the Banyan tree of terrorism. Its roots are very firm and widely spread."

Mr. Vaidik is also an acquaintance and admirer of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, describing him as "a very competent person, doing his best with all the ethnicities and provinces."

But, given the divisions in the country, says Mr. Vaidik, "the present presidential-model constitution will not survive. In the long run, it must be a parliamentary system whose prime minister serves at the pleasure of parliament."

"I am deeply pained at the situation in Afghanistan" says the prominent India-born political analyst, governmental adviser, former editor of the views section of Nav Bharat Times, and founder-editor of BHASHA, the Hindi News Agency.

These days, Mr. Vaidik puts in 18-hour days of travel and lectures abroad, chairs the Council for Indian Foreign Policy, which he founded, and writes two weekly newspaper columns for 200 newspapers. He spoke to the Citizen recently from the studio of the Voice of America in Washington, D.C., where he was interviewed about the king.

Afghans don't have enough food, homes, roads, hospitals and schools, he says, while opium production has hit record levels. "The warlords and the Taliban thrive on income from opium."

Any sudden pullout would doom peace forces working in Afghanistan and would demoralize the other nations there, he says. "Because Canada is known as a very peaceful and well-meaning nation, a nation which is good to others," he says, "this image of Canada will also suffer."

While he supports a popular view here that Canada should withdraw its forces, he says Canada and the U.S. should first create a regular Afghan army of at least 80,000 soldiers. "That's not a very big number. When the king left, Afghanistan had 140,000 soldiers."

In 1973, during one of his leisurely trips abroad, to Italy, King Zaher Shah was deposed bloodlessly by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud Khan. Mr. Vaidik says he was upset, but held his tongue. Daoud Khan, also a friend, complained to him that the new constitution, introduced by the king, contained a clause that shut out all royalty from holding power. After the coup, Daoud Khan named himself president and ruled until his assassination five years later during a communist-led revolution. The king went into exile in Rome. He returned to Afghanistan upon the death of his wife, and after the Taliban were routed.

While the king returned to rally his country to stability, says Mr. Vaidik, today, Afghan soldiers lack training and pay. The more time it takes for help to come from the West, the more soldiers will join the Taliban or go to the Mujahedeen in Pakistan.

However ominous his predictions, he has one optimistic scenario. But time will run out on it, he predicts, in a year.

He says that if Canada, the U.S., Japan and Britain concentrate on Afghanistan, and give it the money and manpower it needs, the country could build a strong national army in that year.

Afghans need look no further than India to find thousands of competent workers, he says — doctors, soldiers, administrators and teachers who would provide services at one-tenth the cost of western workers.

"India has a very efficient bureaucracy — I don't say this because I'm from India," he says. "I love Afghanistan so much that first I'm Afghan and then I'm Indian."

"Western people feel very threatened in Afghanistan. A lot of Afghans have a grievance against Christians because they fought three great wars in the 1800s against the Christian armies of the British.

"Afghans don't like Pakistanis — their smuggling, their undesirable trade practices," he says. "And, rarely discussed by the western press, they say 'We don't like the way Pakistanis come as teachers and have an eye on our girls, marry our girls.'

"Our Hindu men don't go and try to marry Afghan girls or elope with them. The Afghans feel very safe with the Indians. We have been training Afghans for the last 40 years; many military officers and cabinet ministers were trained in India."

The war in Iraq has diverted the world's resources from Afghanistan though, he says, Iraq never posed the threat to world peace that Afghanistan does, reverting to "a kind of international asylum for all terrorists, a no-man's-land and a free-for-all."

"I love America. I love Canada. They are great countries, something unprecedented in human history. But through lack of foresight, all the gains of civilization might go down the drain.

"My theory is that the problems in Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan — it is such a big problem area — will consume all the resources of the western powers and will denude them of their prosperity and peace."

"Inadvertently, the foreign armies have created so much resentment against forces by bombing civilians and hospitals. This is natural as they do not know the area, the people and they do what they deem is correct."

In the Islamic mind, he says, the U.S. is connected with anti-Islamic feeling. And it is connected with the feeling that Americans are there "to serve their own national interest and as the father of the Taliban," he says, whom they supported to drive out their Cold War rivals, the Russians, after their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

"Afghans hated the Russians, but have forgotten them," he says. "I was there twice during the Russian occupation and I saw an Afghani throw a stone when Soviet leader (Leonid) Brezhnev came on the set — threw a stone at his own television!"

Mr. Vaidik visited the ailing King Zaher Khan in his bedroom in Afghanistan, where they talked for many hours about the country they both love.

The king was known as an easygoing, "peaceful, peaceful man, very simple with no taste for the ambitions of politics," says Mr. Vaidik. During his exceptionally long and stable rule of 40 years, the king was able to thaw U.S. and Russian Cold War tensions to the point that they co-operated on road-building. (Mr. Vaidik wrote his PhD thesis on the phenomenon.) The king served more as adviser to the real decision-makers. During his reign, religious and press freedom flourished.

The king told Mr. Vaidik that the Taliban "are not of God — they have flouted all the tenets of Afghan culture. And he told me how they had mutilated the paintings on the palace wall, had broken the furniture, the crockery and mutilated paintings.

"He showed me pictures. You know what they did? Any paintings showing legs — even those with birds — were considered pornographic and they destroyed them."

Mr. Vaidik had his last talk with the king in Afghanistan two years ago. "He was a very optimistic man. He always thought the Afghans shall overcome present difficulties — that they have a genius for survival and progress."

Donna Jacobs is an Ottawa writer; her e-mail address is donnabjacobs@hotmail.com

Keep Canada neutral

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PAGE: A14
KEYWORDS: 0
SOURCE: The Gazette
WORD COUNT: 152

Re: "Troops should stay until 2010" (Opinion, July 30).

Peacekeeping, humanitarianism and a strong sense of international responsibility are bona-fide Canadian values. Former prime minister Lester B. Pearson exemplified these values, coming up with a face-saving formula to resolve the Suez Crisis in 1956: forming a neutral peacekeeping force. Since then, Canada's reputation as a peaceful nation has been cemented.

Now, however, with the federal government's commitment in Afghanistan – and the prospect of troops remaining until 2010 – Canada's reputation as a peacekeeping nation is in serious doubt.

In his article, Bob Bergen cites lots of data to justify why Canadian forces should remain in Afghanistan until 2010. But he neglects to mention the most significant figure: the number of Canadian casualties.

Perhaps it is time to restore the image of our once-peaceful nation by demanding an immediate withdrawal of all Canadian troops from Afghanistan before we, too, become a bellicose state.

Saad Abbasi

Brossard

PM to shuffle cabinet next week: report; Defence minister expected to lose portfolio

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PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; POLITICS; CANDIDATES
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 246

Gordon O'Connor will be bumped out of the Defence portfolio in a cabinet shuffle expected in the week beginning Aug. 13, according to a weekend report.

CTV News reported Saturday night that sources expect Prime Minister Stephen Harper will put Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice into Defence and move O'Connor to Veterans Affairs.

A shuffle this month would be Harper's second change to his cabinet since coming to power in 2006.

His officials have told CanWest News that a shuffle won't elevate any backbenchers to the club; only existing ministers will be moved around.

Speculation on the shuffle has centred around O'Connor, who is saddled with selling an increasingly unpopular war in Afghanistan, and seemingly at odds with his chief of defence staff.

Heritage Minister Bev Oda will be given a less challenging post and Revenue Minister Carol Skelton, who announced Friday she won't run in the next election, will be dropped, CTV reported.

The report said Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay will remain in their posts.

The expected cabinet shuffle comes after yet another poll showing Harper's Conservatives are still failing to improve their support among the electorate.

The survey released last week, conducted by Ipsos Reid for CanWest News Service and Global National, shows the Tories are stalled at 34-per-cent support nationally, a slight dip from the 36 per cent they secured when they won the election Jan. 23, 2006.

The Liberals are at 32-per-cent support, the NDP at 17 and the Greens at eight.

"This poll is important because 18 months is usually the lifespan of most governments in a minority position and, if this is a referendum on performance, it really hasn't gone anywhere," said John Reid, Ipsos senior vice-president.

Harper has opportunity to lay out his vision: Opinion, Page A15

War widows cry for justice

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PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.06
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
KEYWORDS: PENSIONS; WORKERS' COMPENSATION
DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: AFP
WORD COUNT: 135

More than 100 people, many of them widows, called yesterday for international help in identifying remains found in the latest mass grave to be uncovered in Afghanistan.

The women, joined by a few children and men, gathered outside the UN mission in Kabul where they held up images of their loved ones as they called for those behind the atrocities to be brought to justice.

The latest grave was found last month three kilometres outside Kabul at the site of weapons bunkers dating back to the 1979–1989 Soviet occupation.

Officials have said it might contain the bodies of hundreds of people who have gone missing during nearly three decades of war.

Some of the demonstrators shouted slogans against former warlords, many of whom now hold senior government posts or are members of Afghanistan's first democratically elected parliament.

One girl held up a placard reading: "I want the person who killed my father to come to court."

Afghan president's support of Iran irritates U.S. officials; Karzai meets Bush at camp David 'Not closer, not farther away' in Bin Laden search

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EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A3

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: DENNIS BRACK, BLOOMBERG NEWS / Afghan President Hamid Karzai with U.S. President George W. Bush and his wife, Laura Bush, at his arrival ceremony at Camp David yesterday. ; Colour Photo: PAULA BRONSTEIN, GETTY IMAGES / Afghan women demonstrate yesterday in front of the UN office in Kabul, holding photographs of their missing family members. The burqa-clad women, many widowed, were demanding international help to identify remains uncovered in a mass grave. ;

KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; NOBEL PRIZE; INVESTIGATIONS; IRAN; PAKISTAN; AFGHANISTAN

DATELINE: CAMP DAVID, Maryland

SOURCE: AFP

WORD COUNT: 487

Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrived at Camp David yesterday for talks with President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in his country after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Bush welcomed Karzai, one of his key allies, at the Camp David presidential retreat where they were expected to confer over the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The drugs trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban also were likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions.

But Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

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He went on to say Afghanistan and Iran had "very, very good, very, very close relations. ... We will continue to have good relations with Iran. We will continue to resolve issues, if there are any, to arise."

His remarks differed markedly from the U.S. stance, which sees Iran as a major menace that bankrolls terrorists, supplies arms to insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeks to develop nuclear weapons.

Afghan president's support of Iran irritates U.S. officials; Karzai meets Bush at camp David 'Not closer, not farther away' in Bin Laden search

The U.S. position was reiterated yesterday by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as she defended the U.S. decision to sell tens of billions of dollars in arms to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to thwart Iranian ambitions.

U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates, just returned from a Middle East trip with Rice, offered in response to Karzai's comments that Iran was "playing both sides of the street in Afghanistan."

"I think they're doing some things to help the Afghan government," Gates told CNN. "I think they're also doing things to help the Taliban, including providing weapons."

The White House earlier said Bush and Karzai would discuss Washington's war on terror and "review their work together to enhance Afghanistan's long-term democracy, prosperity, and security."

Karzai indicated security forces were no closer than they were a few years ago to finding Osama bin Laden, the elusive chief of the al-Qa'ida network.

"We are not closer, we are not farther away from it. We are where we were a few years ago," Karzai said.

"I definitely know he cannot be in Afghanistan. Where he is is a question I cannot answer at this point."

The Taliban insurgency began months after their 2001 ouster by U.S. forces and has intensified, having already claimed thousands of lives, mainly of militants.

But a counter-offensive by U.S. and NATO forces has led to increasing civilian deaths, and Karzai has angrily accused foreign soldiers of an "extreme use of force."

At least 600 Afghan civilians have been killed in insurgency-linked violence this year, half of them by international forces, according to statistics used by the United Nations.

Many of the deaths have been caused by the coalition tasked with hunting down Taliban militants and their

Al-Qa'ida allies believed to operate along the rugged Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Medical aid dropped for hostages; South Korean crisis casts shadow on visit

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KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
BYLINE: SAYED SALAHUDDIN
SOURCE: Reuters; AFP contributed to this report
WORD COUNT: 316

Afghan doctors delivered medicine yesterday for 21 South Koreans kidnapped by Taliban rebels in Afghanistan more than two weeks ago.

The head of a private Afghan clinic said his team had dropped more than \$1,200 worth of antibiotics, painkillers, vitamin tablets and heart pills in an area of desert in the Qarabagh district of Ghazni province as instructed by the rebels.

"This is a big achievement. Among the Koreans are doctors who know how to use these medicines," Mohammad Hashim Wahaj told reporters in Ghazni, the main town of the province where 23 South Korean church volunteers were snatched from a bus on July 20.

"It was a big risk, but we had to take the risk because it is a humanitarian issue," he said.

The Taliban have killed two of their captives and are threatening to kill the rest if the Afghan government fails to release rebel prisoners.

On Saturday, a provincial government official was kidnapped by the Taliban, Afghan authorities said. The official from the local agriculture department was abducted while visiting his family's farming land just outside Ghazni.

Kabul has refused to free jailed Taliban, saying that would just encourage more kidnappings.

The hostage issue is likely to cast a shadow over two days of security talks between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. President George W. Bush due to begin at the U.S. presidential retreat, Camp David, later yesterday.

Wahaj said he had been in contact with the kidnappers who told him two of the remaining hostages were seriously ill. The Taliban were willing to free those two hostages, he said, but only if two Taliban prisoners were also freed.

The insurgent demand for prisoners to be released has proved a sticking point in all negotiations so far.

A woman who identified herself as Lim Hyun-joo, a 32-year-old nurse and the group's guide who speaks the local Dari language, pleaded for help from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, himself a South Korean.

The South Korean government is under intense domestic pressure to secure the release of the hostages, but Seoul has told the insurgents there is a limit to what it can do as it has no power to free prisoners in Afghan jails.

Tee time under the Taliban; Afghanistan's 'best and only' golf course bears scars of the country's turbulent past

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A2

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: DON MCARTHUR, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE / Muhammad AfzalAbdul, head professional at Afghanistan's only golf course, fires one down the middle on the opening hole. Abdul has been imprisoned twice for his love of golf – first by the Russians and then the Taliban – and came back to open the course both times. ;

KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=KABUL

BYLINE: DON MARTIN

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 682

The blast of a far-off bomb hit in the middle of my backswing. That might be grounds to run for cover or at least claim a mulligan on Canadian golf courses, but this being Kabul and having my iron shot go further than its pathetically-short normal, I opted to play on.

Billed as "the best and only golf course in Afghanistan," the Kabul Golf Course has been declared free of landmines and boasts of freshly-oiled greens made from pressed sand.

But if you're like me, stranded here by exit visa problems and bureaucratic foot-dragging for a sixth day, even golf played on rock-hard dirt fairways with thistle-like weeds for ground cover is a slice of pretend-you're-home heaven.

It is a surreal experience, almost worth the outrageous \$25 greens fee, if only to say you've played one the world's truly horrible courses. Yet this strange oft-bombed course is arguably a 5,614-yard analogy of Afghanistan, accurately reflecting the country's political stability or, more often than not, instability.

It opened in the early 1970s when Afghanistan was last in a semi-calm state, but closed six years later as the Communists came to power backed by the Soviet military. It reopened after the Soviets retreated, only to be forcibly closed down four years later when the Taliban formed a government.

The original pro shop was bombed by the Taliban and never repaired. Open ditches still bisect the course as a reminder of the Taliban's destruction of the underground irrigation system.

The local golf pro, Muhammad Abdul, was thrown in jail by the Taliban for a couple months in the late 1990s, his trophies seized and destroyed on the ground golf was the past-time of idle infidels and helping foreigners improve their game was sinfully anti-Islamic.

After the Taliban were vanquished from power in 2001 to become the insurgency being fought by soldiers today, the course reopened under Afghanistan government ownership.

The first item of business was to remove three bombed Soviet tanks and the remnants of a troop carrier cluttering the fairway, which would be considered a lateral hazard if struck by a wayward ball.

Then the fairways were subjected to a U.S.-financed mine-removal training project to clear away nasty surprises that could turn the search for a misplayed ball into a life-ending misstep.

Today, the rusty main gate hangs off its hinges and a police station strafed with bullet holes guards the entrance.

After driving a road that runs down the middle of the first fairway to the parking lot, you wake up a clubhouse manager napping under a tree, who groggily refuses to dicker on the high price to play a round of what the scorecard claims is "golf with attitude."

A contest among half a dozen teenagers to serve as caddy ensues, the winner being Ahmad, a high school graduate who plans to attend university to become a teacher. He shot an even-par on the course earlier this year and boasts a five handicap, which means he's a scratch golfer and PGA contender on any other golf course in the world.

He's a dream caddy, too, dutifully teeing up every shot by pounding a bent plastic tee into the ground using his fist. He sings your praises after even the most badly hooked drive. He pretends not to understand that gimmies count on the scorecard. And just before the moment to pay him arrived, he declared I was the best foreign golfer to ever grace the course. The suggested \$5 caddy fee immediately became \$10.

But there are unique complications to playing the game Kabul style.

Like the ant colonies surfacing on the "green." Or having your approach to the sixth hole require a shot over the roof of the police station, which I managed to hit with a mud-loosening well-struck eight iron. Or, after bringing along your translator for his first-ever golfing experience, he thinks part of his job is to carve a shallow trench into the sand to guide your ball into the hole.

In the end, as I signed off a mostly-bogus 42 score after nine holes, one thought kept running through my mind: I'll never play this course again.

Nah. Just kidding. I was thinking that only in Afghanistan could just having a golf course to play, even if the only one in the country resembles a goat track under construction, be the scorecard to a nation's political health.

Perhaps it's a hopeful sign that stability will become par for the course.

Tillman truth lost in the fog of war

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PAGE: A9
COLUMN: Kevin Brooker
ILLUSTRATION: Graphic: (See hard copy for graphic).;
KEYWORDS: JUSTICE; GOVERNMENT; POLITICIANS; UNITED STATES
BYLINE: Kevin Brooker
SOURCE: Calgary Herald
WORD COUNT: 643

For those of us strongly opposed to Canada's war role in Afghanistan, America's still-unfolding Pat Tillman affair is giving us a foreshadowing of the sort of public recriminations -- tortured, on their face, but ultimately unsatisfactory -- that we are likely to experience sometime in the future, if and when we begin to seriously examine what we have wrought there.

You no doubt remember Tillman. Whether on the gridiron or the battlefield, he typified the all-American hero. Shortly after 9/11, Tillman left a promising and lucrative career with the NFL's Arizona Cardinals to volunteer as an elite U.S. army Ranger.

On April 22, 2004, Tillman died in what was initially characterized as a Taliban attack, and ultimately led to the posthumous awarding of a Silver Star for valour. It wasn't until five weeks later that the Pentagon acknowledged the truth of what happened in that dusty Afghan canyon: Tillman was shot by one of his own.

Worse, evidence has since mounted that it wasn't unintentional friendly fire, but indeed, fratricide, that claimed Tillman's life.

Recently, a Freedom of Information Act request revealed that, although investigators found no evidence that his unit was under enemy fire, Tillman died from three M-16 bullets to the forehead at a range of around 10 metres.

The released documents also show that after noting the discrepancy between the forensic evidence and the Pentagon's account of events, medical examiners for the military urged superiors to pursue criminal investigations. Their pleas were ignored.

Now, friendly fire incidents are not unusual on any battlefield. Nor are they always accidental. During the Vietnam war, the grunts had an expression for it: "fragging." There were hundreds of documented cases where officers were killed by their subordinates (often with anonymously delivered fragmentation grenades), usually because they were perceived to be gung-ho to the point of recklessness.

That doesn't seem likely in Tillman's case, however. Fellow platoon members say he was courageous but professional, and was well-liked by all.

As the story trickles out, it also appears that Tillman was far from an unquestioning robot. He read broadly and voraciously, and reports indicate he became deeply disillusioned with the wars in both theatres.

A fellow soldier testified that as early as the first month of the Iraq invasion, Tillman told him, "You know, this war is so f---ing illegal." He advised colleagues to vote against George W. Bush in the upcoming election.

According to Tillman's mother, one of his friends had arranged for him to meet with famous antiwar dissident Noam Chomsky when he left Afghanistan, fuelling speculation that Tillman was preparing to leave the military and use his celebrity against the cause which he had once rushed to support.

We may never have the documentary proof of that; although Tillman kept a regular journal even on the battlefield, apparently those have all disappeared.

Clearly, a scenario that plays out that way would have had devastating implications for the architects of war. Covering up the truth could only have been seen to be essential, particularly in light of the fact that the Abu Ghraib scandal broke publicly just one week after Tillman's death.

No wonder former defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld opted for the Alberto Gonzales defence when he testified before Congress last week. He mostly couldn't recall learning about or discussing Tillman's real fate, despite the fact that months earlier his department had actively exploited the public relations boost which Tillman's enlistment had given them. Rumsfeld joins a host of generals who have disavowed any responsibility in the matter. Unlike him, however, some of them have received "letters of admonishment."

The most dire consequence so far? Retired three-star lieutenant-general Philip Kensinger is expected to receive a tersely worded reprimand and lose a star from his epaulet. Call it the fog of war syndrome. And get used to it. I expect we'll be seeing a lot of it in years to come.

Kevin Brooker is a Calgary writer

Fast exit forecast strains credibility

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Canadians had not heard many good-news stories about our military mission in Afghanistan — until two weeks ago. That's when Canada's Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor predicted a fast exit for our front-line troops.

According to O'Connor, Afghan troops currently being trained would be ready to take on the Taliban by next February. "As we train more and more of the Afghan army to carry out their operations, we will continue to withdraw . . . at some stage we will be basically in reserve."

That was wonderful news for all Canadians, regardless of their opinion of the mission.

We all look forward to the day when our troops can come home with honour. Our country has borne more than its share of combat death and injury in a brutal guerrilla insurgency.

The minister must have felt a great deal of satisfaction in announcing such long-awaited news. After all, many critics — including this writer — have questioned the minister's competence and demanded his firing.

There is one problem with his announcement — just one problem. It raises a huge credibility issue that should concern every citizen of Canada and Britain.

Why Britain? What does Britain have to do with a good-news message by Canada's defence minister? The answer is simple. Just three weeks ago, Britain's senior generals issued a blunt warning to the British prime minister that the military campaign in Afghanistan is facing a catastrophic failure.

Lord Inge, the former chief of the defence staff, was reportedly speaking with the direct authority of the British senior generals when he warned of a "strategic failure" in Afghanistan.

Lord Inge also endorsed comments made by Lord Ashdown, the former British Liberal Democratic party leader. Lord Ashdown pointed to the lack of a co-ordinated military command stemming from two independent commands; the NATO multinational "hearts and minds" campaign, and the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom offensive against the Taliban.

Lord Ashdown was blunt. "Unless we put this right, unless we have a unitary system of command, we are going to lose. The battle for this is the battle of public opinion. The polls are slipping. Once they go on the slide, it is almost impossible to win them back. . . . There is a very short shelf life for an occupation force."

These comments echo those made by a British all-party Commons defence select committee. Those MPs said that the combination of civilian casualties, war damage and U.S.-led attempts to eradicate lucrative poppy farming risk turning ordinary Afghans toward the Taliban.

Do you see the huge dimensions of the credibility problem, and why both Canadians and Britons have a stake in the outcome? Canada's defence minister is saying one thing, and British senior generals are saying something fundamentally different.

The two sets of comments leave us scratching our heads in confusion. How can we understand such a stunning contradiction? Perhaps we should be asking ourselves some pertinent questions.

Are the senior generals of the British army competent? Why would they mislead the British prime minister and their nation, particularly when their comments speak to the failure of a mission that they helped to lead?

What about the competency of O'Connor? Do Canadians perceive him to be competent and trustworthy? What interests might he have in misleading the Canadian public — including the men and women serving in our armed forces?

I know how I would answer that question, and I suspect that most Canadians have the same answer. However, we might all be judging him too harshly. Is the real issue the competence of O'Connor, or is it the addiction to "spin" that is running amok in the Prime Minister's Office?

Is O'Connor simply incompetent, or is he following political orders from the PMO to "spin" the situation?

If O'Connor is incompetent, he must be fired. The lives of our men and women in uniform demand no less. If O'Connor is following political orders, he has clearly misled — and failed — his country and its troops. As a former Canadian army general, Gordon O'Connor should understand there is no longer any honourable alternative to his resignation.

His course is now crystal-clear. He must resign, and the sooner the better.

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Golf in Kabul gives hint of being home; 'Mine-free' links a symbol of hope

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COLUMN: In Afghanistan

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Paula Bronstein, Getty Images / A golfer tees off at the rustic Kabul Golf Course, which has been in operation for decades, but often closed due to war and instability. ; Photo: Ahmad Masood, Reuters / There is no worry of sand traps on the Kabul course, as the entire links is one big hazard. ; Photo: Ahmad Masood, Reuters / A player clears some grass — a rarity on the course — as he prepares for a shot. ; Photo: Don McArthur, CanWest News Service / Destroyed Soviet tanks no longer litter the Kabul Golf Course. ; Photo: Paula Bronstein, Getty Images / A duffer prepares to challenge the nine-hole, 5,614-yard desert course. ;

BYLINE: Don Martin

SOURCE: Calgary Herald

WORD COUNT: 700

The blast of a far-off bomb hit in the middle of my backswing. That might be grounds to run for cover or at least claim a mulligan on Canadian golf courses, but this being Kabul and having my iron shot go further than its pathetically short normal, I opted to play on.

Billed as "the best and only golf course in Afghanistan," the Kabul Golf Course has been declared free of landmines and boasts of freshly oiled greens made from pressed sand.

But if you're like me, stranded here by exit visa problems and bureaucratic foot-dragging for a sixth day, even golf played on rock-hard dirt fairways with thistle-like weeds for ground cover is a slice of pretend-you're-home heaven.

It is a surreal experience, almost worth the outrageous \$25 US greens fee, if only to say you've played one of the world's truly horrible courses.

Yet this strange, oft-bombed course is arguably a 5,614-yard analogy of Afghanistan, accurately reflecting the country's political stability or, more often than not, instability.

It opened in the early 1970s when Afghanistan was last in a semi-calm state, but closed six years later as the Communists came to power backed by the Soviet military. It reopened after the Soviets retreated, only to be forcibly closed down four years later when the Taliban formed a government.

The original pro shop was bombed by the Taliban and never repaired. Open ditches still bisect the course as a reminder of the Taliban's destruction of the underground irrigation system.

The local golf pro, Muhammad Abdul, was thrown in jail by the Taliban for a couple months in the late 1990s, his trophies seized and destroyed on the grounds that golf was the past-time of idle infidels and

helping foreigners improve their game was sinfully anti-Islamic.

After the Taliban were vanquished from power in 2001 to become the insurgency being fought by Canadian soldiers today, the course reopened under Afghanistan government ownership. The first item of business was to remove three bombed Soviet tanks and the remnants of a troop carrier cluttering the fairway, which would be considered a lateral hazard if struck by a wayward ball.

Then the fairways were subjected to a U.S.-financed mine-removal training project to clear away nasty surprises that could turn the search for a misplayed ball into a life-ending misstep.

Today, the rusty main gate hangs off its hinges and a police station strafed with bullet holes guards the entrance.

After driving a road that runs down the middle of the first fairway to the parking lot, you wake up a clubhouse manager napping under a tree, who groggily refuses to dicker on the high price to play a round of what the scorecard claims is "golf with attitude."

A contest among half a dozen teenagers to serve as caddy ensues, the winner being Ahmad, a high school graduate who plans to attend university to become a teacher. He shot an even-par on the course earlier this year and boasts a five handicap, which means he's a scratch golfer and PGA contender on any other golf course in the world.

He's a dream caddy, too, dutifully teeing up every shot by pounding a bent plastic tee into the ground using his fist. He sings your praises after even the most badly hooked drive. He pretends not to understand that gimmies count on the scorecard. And just before the moment to pay him arrived, he declared that I was the best foreign golfer to ever grace the course. The suggested \$5 caddy fee immediately became \$10.

But there are unique complications to playing the game, Kabul style.

Like the ant colonies surfacing on the "green." Or having your approach to the sixth hole require a shot over the roof of the police station, which I managed to hit with a mud-loosening well-struck eight iron. Or after bringing along your translator for his first-ever golfing experience, he thinks part of his job is to carve a shallow trench into the sand to guide your ball into the hole.

In the end, as I signed off a mostly bogus 42 score after nine holes, one thought kept running through my mind: I'll never play this course again.

Nah. Just kidding. I was thinking that only in Afghanistan could just having a golf course to play, even if the only one in the country resembles a goat track under construction, be the scorecard to a nation's political health.

Perhaps it's a hopeful sign that stability will become par for the course.

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Karzai's Iran reference raises eyebrows at Camp David

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Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrived in Camp David, Md., on Sunday for talks with President George W. Bush on the deteriorating security situation in his country after raising eyebrows by describing U.S. nemesis Iran as more friend than foe.

Bush welcomed Karzai, one of his key allies, at the Camp David presidential retreat where they were expected to confer over the Taliban insurgency and mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The drug trade, economic development and the fate of 21 South Korean hostages held by the Taliban were also likely to be high on the agenda for the two days of discussions.

But Karzai, who rose to power in 2002 with U.S. backing, introduced a potential wrinkle in the talks with some friendly public comments about Iran, considered by Washington a major threat to global stability.

In an interview broadcast Sunday on CNN, Karzai appeared to turn back U.S. allegations that Iranian arms were helping to erode the security situation in Afghanistan. "So far, Iran has been a helper and a solution," he said.

"Iran has been a supporter of Afghanistan, in the peace process that we have and the fight against terror, and the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan," Karzai said in the interview.

He went on to say that Afghanistan and Iran had "very, very good, very, very close relations. . . . We will continue to have good relations with Iran. We will continue to resolve issues, if there are any, to arise."