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Women are taking on a deadly role

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS/JORDANIAN TV / Iraqi Sajidaal-Rishawi is shown wearing an explosive belt as she discusses in 2005 her failed bid to set off an explosives belt inside one of the three Amman hotels targeted by al-Qaida. Fifty-seven people were killed in the attacks. ; Photo: Osama bin Laden ;

BYLINE: PETER BERGEN AND PAUL CRUICKSHANK

SOURCE: Washington Post

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The last thing that seven Iraqi policemen at a checkpoint in Ramadi in July saw was a woman approaching them. Seconds later, she detonated her explosives vest, killing herself and everybody else at the site. Two weeks earlier in Pakistan, some would-be female suicide bombers were less successful: When government forces stormed Islamabad's Red Mosque, several women were among the die-hards hoping to make a stand, but they didn't have sufficient explosives.

Surprised? Don't be. Female participation in jihadist groups and operations has grown alarmingly in recent years. And unless we come to terms with the phenomenon, female Islamist militants might be an important part of our future.

Islamic puritans once upheld a strong taboo against women's active participation in the holy struggle. In al-Qaida's Afghan training camps, wives were segregated from men, their primary role being to groom sons to follow their fathers. Many al-Qaida members are rabid misogynists; just recall the will of the lead 9/11 hijacker, Muhammad Atta, which insisted that no women attend his funeral or visit his grave.

But since September 2001, women have become increasingly involved in Islamist terrorism. The most important underlying factor is the jihadists' deepening sense that they are engaged in a total war against the United States and the Muslim regimes it supports. Remember, Osama bin Laden used to be a relatively lonely voice, arguing that Islam was facing an existential struggle to defend itself from U.S. aggression.

But the U.S. occupation of Iraq has convinced many more militants worldwide that bin Laden's paradigm is the best way of explaining their world. All's fair in total war, many jihadists have concluded, so many objections to a more active female role in the struggle have been dropped. Meanwhile, women from Pakistan to Iraq to Belgium have been galvanized by images of Muslims being victimized by U.S. forces (images shrewdly amplified by al-Qaida's propaganda machine) and have felt drawn to fight.

The key here is the deeply held belief in the Islamic world that Muslim lands are under attack, which lets clerics bless extraordinary actions in the name of self-defence against a rapacious West. This concept was central to a 2003 fatwa by the influential Egyptian scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi that sanctioned female suicide bombings, arguing that "when the enemy assaults a given Muslim territory, it becomes incumbent upon all its residents to fight against them to the extent that a woman should go out even without the consent of her husband." Al-Qaida's ideologues have issued their own online injunctions urging women to martyr

themselves for the "global jihad."

Perhaps most troubling is the use of female bombers. As a tactic, this makes good sense: Women are less likely to be searched at checkpoints or borders and can hide explosives under their Islamic dress. But it is the shock value of such attacks that is attractive to the militants' leaders, who seek maximum publicity.

A rising number of Muslim women brought up in the West are participating in terrorist operations — ironically, it seems, as a result of their greater expectations of gender equality in all spheres. Al-Qaida's second female suicide bomber was Muriel Degauque, 38, a Belgian convert to Islam who in 2005 triggered her suicide vest as a U.S. patrol passed her in Baqouba, Iraq, killing only herself. The wives of the members of the so-called Hofstad group, which has been linked to the 2004 assassination of the controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, engaged in target practice; one accompanied her husband on an unsuccessful mission to kill the feminist parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali. And al-Qaida's only alleged senior female operative is Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani American who studied neuroscience at MIT and worked in the United States before disappearing in Pakistan in 2003.

Beyond Europe, some women have launched terrorist attacks simply to seek revenge, such as many of the so-called black widow suicide bombers in Chechnya and some female recruits to al-Qaida in Iraq. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, explicitly sanctioned female suicide bombings. In September 2005, in the Iraqi town of Tall Afar, the Zarqawi network used a woman in a suicide attack for the first time. Two months later, Zarqawi launched an attack against three American hotels in Amman, Jordan, killing some 60 people. One of Zarqawi's bombers was Sajida al-Rishawi, an Iraqi who had seen three of her brothers die in Iraq. (She was captured by Jordanian authorities after her explosives belt failed to detonate.)

Farhana Ali, a researcher at the Rand Corp., has documented about 10 female terrorist attacks in Iraq and adds that websites and forums suggest that many more women are fighting alongside the insurgents. Keen to bulk up his ranks quickly, Zarqawi calculated that using female operatives could shame men into volunteering for suicide missions, and his replacements seem to agree. By being willing to use women, al-Qaida in Iraq instantly doubled its potential number of recruits.

Kashmiri terrorist groups, such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, have given women more military tasks, including suicide attacks, in recent years. In Somalia, female suicide bombers have been deployed twice in the past year. Two women blew themselves up in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in March 2004. And in May 2005, two veiled women drove up behind a tourist bus in central Cairo and fired shots into its back window before turning their guns on themselves.

Women still account for only a handful of the hundreds of suicide attacks conducted by radical Islamic groups each year. The main way women have played a greater role in such operations is in auxiliary functions: running websites, handling finances and logistics, urging on their husbands. Last summer, Cossor Ali, a British woman of Pakistani descent, was charged with withholding knowledge of her husband Abdullah's involvement in a plot to blow up as many as 10 American airliners — demonstrating that women can play important support roles even as "stay-at-home" wives.

Malika el-Aroud is a case in point. She is the Belgian-Moroccan widow of the al-Qaida operative who assassinated Ahmed Shah Massoud, the leader of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, just hours before 9/11. Aroud travelled to Switzerland after the Taliban fell. Although she had played the traditional wife's role in Afghanistan, segregated from her husband's colleagues and unaware of her husband's impending mission, she took on a much more assertive role back in the West, visiting al-Qaida prisoners in European jails and running a pro-al-Qaida website. When one of us met with Aroud in her Swiss chalet last year, she did not disguise her violent views, which outlined a neofeminist militant jihadism. Because of the war in Iraq, she told us, "even us sisters should all rise up and go to the airports and clearly declare we are going to fight."

Aroud was convicted last month of terrorism offences in Switzerland. But there are plenty more like her.

Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank are fellows at the New York University Center on Law and Security. Bergen, also a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, is the author of the Osama bin Laden I Know.

With cabinet shuffle, Harper eyes new strategy on Afghanistan mission

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There's no doubt one of the key aims of Stephen Harper's cabinet shuffle was to strengthen the ministerial team in charge of the Afghanistan military mission.

What's not so clear is whether his decision to install Peter MacKay at defence and Maxime Bernier at foreign affairs signals a determination to stay the course or a subtle shift in agenda with an eye to the next election.

The uncertainty stems in large part from Harper's own declaration — delivered in June, just as Parliament was recessing for the summer — that he wouldn't keep Canadian combat troops in Afghanistan past February 2009 unless there's "some degree of consensus" that it's the right thing to do.

Harper went on to make it clear he personally believes it's still the right thing. But his words were taken by many as an invitation to opposition parties to help revamp the mission in a way that would be more to their liking.

There have been no meetings since then with the Liberals, Bloc Quebecois or NDP in search of what the prime minister hopefully termed a "meeting of minds." Nor does it sound as if anybody is rushing to open negotiations in the wake of this week's shuffle.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion dismissed MacKay as a man who's already been discredited on Afghan policy by his 18 months in the foreign affairs portfolio and denounced Bernier as "very right wing and close to the U.S. Republican approach."

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe offered much the same assessment and said he's "not very optimistic" about a change of course. NDP Leader Jack Layton simply reiterated his long-standing call to get the troops home as soon as possible.

Norman Spector, a former diplomat and chief of staff to Brian Mulroney, said the political dynamic of the current minority Parliament doesn't favour a statesmanlike, non-partisan approach. He believes, however, that Harper has no choice but to strike a deal with at least one opposition party if he wants to preserve some semblance of his Afghan policy.

The challenge is to "reconfigure" the mission in a way that both sides can live with, Spector said. The NDP likely could never be convinced to drop its outright opposition to the troop deployment, but the Liberals and Bloc could be more amenable.

Both those parties have acknowledged there's no alternative to continuing the mission until the end of the current term in 2009. They maintain that, if Canadian troops stay longer than that, they should pull back from a combat role and spend more time on reconstruction, economic development projects and training of local forces.

If there's a deal to be struck, said Spector, "it's going to require tough negotiations. In the best of all possible worlds the other parties would respond to an olive branch from the government, but who knows?"

Alex Morrison, head of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, thinks the best bet for a deal is with the Liberals. Whether the Bloc signs on could depend on whether Bernier is successful in his assigned task of selling the mission to a Quebec public that has so far been skeptical.

"If Bernier does his job and raises the stock of the Conservative party in Quebec, then the Bloc might just have to hold their noses," Morrison said.

He also believes that, even if Harper can't cut a deal, he may decide to make continuation of the mission a confidence matter and dare the opposition to bring him down and force an election.

"When he says we don't cut and run, he means it. I think he will go quite far to keep us in Afghanistan."

Rob Huebert, a University of Calgary expert on defence policy, isn't so sure Harper would push the opposition to the wall. But he does think Harper is playing a political game with Dion and the Liberals as his chief targets.

The prime minister wins if Dion, whose party first sent troops to Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, relents in his current opposition and strikes a deal to keep them there.

If there's no deal, Harper's exit strategy is then to "wash his hands of the mission and blame the opposition," Huebert said.

That could be a clever move in terms of short-term domestic politics, getting the issue off the table in time for the next election. But there could also be a longer-term strategic downside.

"Canada loses," Huebert said. "Basically, the Taliban has a victory."

Eastern region al-Qaida, Taliban targeted; U.S. troops lead offensive into Afghan territory where bin Laden once hid

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Hundreds of U.S.-led troops have launched an offensive against al-Qaida and Taliban militants in an area of eastern Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden once hid, officials said yesterday.

A bomb attack near the capital, meanwhile, killed three German police officers assigned to protect their country's embassy, and a British national was shot and killed in Kabul.

The offensive involving ground troops and air strikes in Tora Bora region of eastern Nangarhar province is targeting "hundreds of foreign fighters" who are using dug-in fighting positions, said coalition spokesperson Capt. Vanessa Bowman.

The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 attacks.

"This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said in a statement released later yesterday by the Pentagon.

A U.S. official in Washington with knowledge of the operation said it was "intelligence driven" and had been "piggybacked" on top of a previously planned action against extremists.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said it was not clear exactly who was being targeted, but that those believed to be in the area included Taliban officials who could be accompanied by some mid-level members of al-Qaida's leadership — but not the top echelon.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or U.S. and Afghan troops.

Sensitive to criticism over rising civilian casualties in Afghanistan, U.S. officials said they had carefully chosen targets for air strikes.

Around Kabul, the bomb that killed the three Germans wounded a fourth, officials said.

Also yesterday, attackers in Kabul shot and killed a British man employed by a private security firm, according to the British Embassy and the firm.

Eastern region al-Qaida, Taliban targeted; U.S. troops lead offensive into Afghan territory where bin Laden

Zemari Bashary, an Interior Ministry spokesperson, said police arrested two Afghan men suspected in the slaying.

The suspects and victim were employees of ArmorGroup, a private security company protecting a number of Afghan and international clients, including the British Embassy in Kabul, Bashary said.

Separately, U.S.-led coalition and Afghan troops clashed with militants in central Logar province on Tuesday, killing nine suspected militants, the Interior Ministry said. No police or coalition troops were wounded in the clash, it said.

German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said the three Germans killed were police officers deployed to Afghanistan to protect the German Embassy. In a statement, he characterized the explosion as an "underhanded attack."

The officers apparently were on their way to a training session and were travelling in what Schaeuble described as a "particularly well-protected vehicle."

He said Germany's Federal Crime Office was sending experts to Afghanistan to help investigate the explosion.

The wounded officer, who did not suffer life-threatening injuries, was being treated by the German military at a base in Kabul.

U.S. forces launch Afghanistan offensive; Ground troops combine with air strikes in effort to target 'hundreds of foreign fighters' in dug-in positions

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Shuffle maintains the status quo

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This week's small cabinet shuffle by Prime Minister Stephen Harper was without question a limited and narrowly focused exercise intended primarily to give the government a boost by removing Minister of Defence Gordon O'Connor far away from the politically sensitive issue of Canadian participation in Afghanistan. He moved to the National Revenue portfolio where he is unlikely to cause the government any harm.

The rest of the appointments, excepting moving Nova Scotia's Peter MacKay into the key Defence portfolio, were minor and are of little apparent consequence: the shuffle has no obvious benefits for New Brunswickers.

PM Harper is continuing with his top-down style of management and attempting to address specific problems he has faced rather than significantly shake-up his cabinet team and embark on bold new directions. Nor did he grasp the opportunity many thought he might by appointing Minister of Veterans Affairs and N.B. Cabinet representative Greg Thompson to oversee the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

It adds up to maintaining the status quo for New Brunswickers, and especially for the Metro Moncton region. This is not a disaster, but neither is it something to generate any excitement.

Metro Moncton has several crucial issues on the table and they require quick and decisive action if the city is to continue moving ahead as envisioned. These include proceeding with the restoration of the Petitcodiac River — an issue on which Mr. Thompson is ill-informed and gives no reason for optimism that Ottawa will act with the speed and wisdom that is required — assistance with a convention centre to help downtown development, and provision of proper, round-the-clock customs agents at the Greater Moncton International Airport.

These issues have been on the agenda in Ottawa for a considerable time, years, and there is no good reason for further delay, hesitation or lack of action.

A stronger, more politically powerful cabinet presence for the province, whether via a significant promotion for Thompson, who has done well in Veterans Affairs, or via an added member would have been better news from Prime Minister Harper and a clear signal the province matters and is on his radar screen. Instead, the prime minister chose a limited, narrowly focused approach.

What's Harper's next move for Afghanistan?

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Harper went on to make it clear he personally believes it's still the right thing.

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NDP Leader Jack Layton simply reiterated his long-standing call to get the troops home as soon as possible.

Norman Spector, a former diplomat and chief of staff to Brian Mulroney, said the political dynamic of the current minority Parliament doesn't favour a statesmanlike, non-partisan approach.

He believes, however, that Harper has no choice but to strike a deal with at least one opposition party if he wants to preserve some semblance of his Afghan policy.

The challenge is to "reconfigure" the mission in a way that both sides can live with, said Spector. The NDP likely could never be convinced to drop its outright opposition to the troop deployment, but the Liberals and

Bloc could be more amenable.

Both those parties have acknowledged there's no alternative to continuing the mission until the end of the current term in 2009.

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If there's a deal to be struck, said Spector, "it's going to require tough negotiations. In the best of all possible worlds the other parties would respond to an olive branch from the government, but who knows?"

Alex Morrison, head of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, thinks the best bet for a deal is with the Liberals.

Whether the Bloc signs on could depend on whether Bernier is successful in his assigned task of selling the mission to a Quebec public that has so far been skeptical.

"If Bernier does his job and raises the stock of the Conservative party in Quebec, then the Bloc might just have to hold their noses," said Morrison.

He also believes that, even if Harper can't cut a deal, he may decide to make continuation of the mission a confidence matter and dare the opposition to bring him down and force an election.

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But he does think Harper is playing a political game with Dion and the Liberals as his chief targets.

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U.S. troops attack Afghan insurgents

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DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan

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The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting Osama bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 terror attacks on the United States. Bin Laden is believed to have escaped that assault.

"This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said in a statement released late yesterday by the Pentagon.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or U.S. and Afghan troops.

Near the capital Kabul, meanwhile, a bomb attack near a two-vehicle convoy yesterday killed three German police officers and wounded a fourth, officials said.

The explosion near the convoy, which was travelling on an unpaved road about 10 kilometres southeast of Kabul, knocked one of the two vehicles on its side and left it badly damaged.

German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said the three Germans were police officers deployed to Afghanistan to protect the German Embassy. In a statement, he characterized the explosion as an "underhanded attack."

The officers apparently were on their way to a training session and were travelling in what Schaeuble described as a "particularly well-protected vehicle."

He said Germany's Federal Crime Office was sending experts to Afghanistan to help investigate the explosion.

The wounded officer, who did not suffer life-threatening injuries, was being treated by the German military at a base in Kabul.

Amir Mohammad, a police officer, said he believed the bomb was a landmine, but it was not clear if the mine was recently planted or an old one.

What is Harper's next move?; Questions swirl around PM's plans for mission in Afghanistan

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PAGE: B1

SOURCE: CP

BYLINE: Jim Brown

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 655

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Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe offered much the same assessment and said he's "not very optimistic" about a change of course.

NDP Leader Jack Layton simply reiterated his long-standing call to get the troops home as soon as possible.

Norman Spector, a former diplomat and chief of staff to Brian Mulroney, said the political dynamic of the current minority Parliament doesn't favour a statesmanlike, non-partisan approach.

He believes, however, that Harper has no choice but to strike a deal with at least one opposition party if he wants to preserve some semblance of his Afghan policy.

The challenge is to "reconfigure" the mission in a way that both sides can live with, said Spector. The NDP likely could never be convinced to drop its outright opposition to the troop deployment, but the Liberals and Bloc could be more amenable.

Both those parties have acknowledged there's no alternative to continuing the mission until the end of the current term in 2009.

They maintain that, if Canadian troops stay longer than that, they should pull back from combat role and spend more time on reconstruction, economic development projects and training of local forces.

If there's a deal to be struck, said Spector, "it's going to require tough negotiations. In the best of all possible worlds the other parties would respond to an olive branch from the government, but who knows?"

Alex Morrison, head of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, thinks the best bet for a deal is with the Liberals. Whether the Bloc signs on could depend on whether Bernier is successful in his assigned task of selling the mission to a Quebec public that has so far been skeptical.

"If Bernier does his job and raises the stock of the Conservative party in Quebec, then the Bloc might just have to hold their noses," said Morrison.

He also believes that, even if Harper can't cut a deal, he may decide to make continuation of the mission a confidence matter and dare the opposition to bring him down and force an election.

"When he says we don't cut and run, he means it. I think he will go quite far to keep us in Afghanistan."

Rob Huebert, a University of Calgary expert on defence policy, isn't so sure Harper would push the opposition to the wall. But he does think Harper is playing a political game with Dion and the Liberals as his chief targets.

The prime minister wins if Dion, whose party first sent troops to Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, relents in his current opposition and strikes a deal to keep them there.

If there's no deal, Harper's exit strategy is then to "wash his hands of the mission and blame the opposition," said Huebert.

That could be a clever move in terms of short-term domestic politics, getting the issue off the table in time for the next election. But there could also be a longer-term strategic downside. "Canada loses," said Huebert. "Basically the Taliban has a victory."

A promising cabinet shuffle

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.08.16

SECTION: Editorial page

PAGE: 4

COLUMN: Opinion digest

WORD COUNT: 207

Prime Minister Stephen Harper unveiled his third cabinet in 18 months on Tuesday. To be sure, the shuffle had all the usual trappings of political manoeuvring for perceived advantage. The demotion of Gordon O'Connor from Defence to Revenue was an obvious heave–ho of a political liability. He should have been fired in April when his mishandling of allegations of torture in Afghanistan sullied the integrity of both the Armed Forces and the government.

Canadians, however, have every right to expect that the shuffle is about more than this, and there is some evidence of that. It appears that Harper recognizes that he can't wait for an election to unveil a bigger agenda than the one that brought him this far. Moving Jim Prentice, widely regarded as his most trusted and one of his most competent ministers, to Industry, and moving Maxime Bernier, a free–market economist, from Industry to Foreign Affairs, suggests that the government intends to push a strong economic development and productivity agenda in a new session this fall. That can't be a bad thing for Canada.

– Winnipeg Free Press

U.S. targets rebels in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.08.16
SECTION: World
PAGE: A8
WORD COUNT: 195

BAGRAMI, Afghanistan (AP) – Hundreds of U.S.–led troops have launched an offensive against al–Qaida and Taliban militants in an area of eastern Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden once hid, officials said Wednesday.

A bomb attack near the capital, meanwhile, killed three German police officers assigned to protect their country's embassy, and a British national was shot and killed in Kabul.

The offensive involving ground troops and air strikes in Tora Bora region of eastern Nangarhar province is targeting "hundreds of foreign fighters" who are using dug–in fighting positions, said coalition spokeswoman Capt. Vanessa Bowman.

The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 attacks.

"This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said in a statement released later Wednesday by the Pentagon.

A U.S. official in Washington with knowledge of the operation said it was "intelligence driven" and had been "piggy–backed" on top of a previously planned action against extremists.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or U.S. and Afghan troops.

PM rearranges deck chairs; PM stays the course

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.08.16
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
BYLINE: Shuffle
WORD COUNT: 725

DECONSTRUCTING Stephen Harper's third cabinet is much like listening to the prime minister worry out loud about his government's perilous Afghanistan exposure, internal Conservative rivalries and, of course, the next election.

Each Harper move yesterday touches at least one of those concerns, while together they frame a ruling party determined to be seen as still focused on its core priorities and still dreaming about a majority.

Neither rearranging a few ministers nor the prime minister's worn themes is likely to seriously challenge the conclusions of Canadians who still can't bring themselves to trust Conservatives with more power. But Harper did succeed in using mostly the same material to build a cabinet sturdier than its predecessors and mercifully unencumbered by embarrassments.

This time there are no surprise appointments of the floor-crossing Vancouver Liberal David Emerson or Montreal Senator Michael Fortier. This time no Rona Ambrose was humiliated to blur the prime minister's fingerprints on an environment policy judged hopelessly inadequate.

Rather than create new problems, the prime minister is grabbing his most troubling one by the throat. Gone from their posts are the 3Ds: the ministers responsible for defence, diplomacy and development who, along with the prime minister, let Afghanistan become the Conservatives' cross.

Almost as revealing is where Harper is concentrating his strengths. Able Jim Prentice goes to industry at a time when a jittery economy threatens jobs and Ontario's manufacturing base. The inexperienced but now officially risen Quebec star Maxime Bernier becomes foreign minister, the government's senior francophone and another salesman for an Afghanistan policy his province isn't buying. And, finally, the prime minister has partly put aside old grudges to bring Diane Ablonczy closer to the inner circle as an underemployed junior minister.

Still, it was only the overdue removal of Gordon O'Connor from defence that set the prime minister's men and few women in motion. After 19 months of miscues, misinformation and sometimes wild spending, the former general and arms lobbyist now has responsibilities reduced to better match to his ability as minister of national revenue.

O'Connor's demotion, coupled with Peter MacKay's move to defence from foreign affairs, and Josée Verner's shift from the maligned federal development agency CIDA, is intended to alter the image of the polarizing Afghanistan mission.

Changing that negative public perception now depends heavily on MacKay. Having mostly held the prime minister's coat at Foreign Affairs, MacKay must now prove he's up to the demanding, if less cerebral defence task by re-establishing clear civilian control over the military as well as the larger-than-life Rick Hillier while ending confusion over Canada's Kandahar exit strategy.

MacKay's rigger scrum charm will appeal to the troops – many sharing his Atlantic Canada roots – and he's certain to co-exist with the top general more peacefully. But MacKay's loose grasp of the Afghanistan detainee controversy and an errant claim of sovereignty over the North Pole earlier this month are worrying omens.

Still, this shuffle has other layers. MacKay, Prentice and Bernier nurture leadership ambitions and Harper is mischievously giving each a testing new portfolio that will widen their experience and perhaps limit their futures.

More immediate than internal struggle is a federal election no more than two years away and clearly on the prime minister's mind. In resisting wholesale change, Harper is minimizing risk while distancing his administration from Afghanistan's worst political dangers.

That doesn't mean policies already evolving away from combat and towards training will alter dramatically. It does confirm that the prime minister now understands that a war he needlessly made his own stands in the way of the majority he wants.

Still, not much more than that perception and a handful of cabinet portfolios changed yesterday. Harper's post-shuffle message was very much stay-the-course.

Clean government, law-and-order at home and a muscular military presence abroad are the prime minister's once and future priorities. Attractive as they are to core Conservative voters, they are the same priorities that led his party into opinion poll no-man's land. A relatively minor cabinet shuffle that leaves most key players in place won't provide the momentum the ruling party is missing. Nor will a summer spent canvassing the bureaucracy produce a fall bonanza of bold, galvanizing ideas.

With the notable exception of the 3Ds, its business as usual today for a government that's hardly booming.

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James Travers is a national affairs columnist for the Toronto Star.

Harper's Afghan plan; It's unclear whether cabinet shuffle move to stay course or revamp mission

PUBLICATION:	The Chronicle–Herald
DATE:	2007.08.16
SECTION:	Canada
PAGE:	A6
SOURCE:	The Canadian Press
BYLINE:	Jim Brown
ILLUSTRATION:	Defence Minister Peter MacKay, National Revenue Minister Gordon O'Connor, Minister of International Co-operation Bev Oda and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Bernier leave the swearing-in ceremony at Rideau Hall on Tuesday. (CP)
WORD COUNT:	486

OTTAWA – There's no doubt one of the key aims of Stephen Harper's cabinet shuffle was to strengthen the ministerial team in charge of the Afghanistan military mission.

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Harper went on to make it clear he personally believes it's still the right thing. But his words were taken by many as an invitation to opposition parties to help revamp the mission in a way that would be more to their liking.

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Norman Spector, a former diplomat and chief of staff to Brian Mulroney, said the political dynamic of the minority Parliament doesn't favour a statesmanlike, non-partisan approach. He believes, however, that Harper has no choice but to strike a deal with at least one opposition party if he wants to preserve some semblance of his Afghan policy.

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"If Bernier does his job and raises the stock of the Conservative party in Quebec, then the Bloc might just have to hold their noses," said Morrison.

He also believes that, even if Harper can't cut a deal, he may decide to make continuation of the mission a confidence matter and dare the opposition to bring him down and force an election.

Suicide among U.S. soldiers highest in 26 years; Iraq most common denominator, report shows

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.08.16
SECTION: World
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: Pauline Jelinek
WORD COUNT: 416

WASHINGTON – U.S. army soldiers committed suicide last year at the highest rate in 26 years and more than one-quarter did so while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, said a new military report.

The report, obtained ahead of its scheduled release today, found there were 99 confirmed suicides among active-duty soldiers during 2006, up from 88 the previous year and the highest since the 102 suicides in 1991.

"Iraq was the most common deployment location for both (suicides) and attempts," the report said.

The 99 suicides included 28 soldiers deployed to the two wars and 71 who weren't. About twice as many women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan committed suicide as did women not sent to war, the report said.

Preliminary numbers for the first half of this year indicate the number of suicides could decline across the service in 2007 but increase among troops serving in the wars, officials said.

The increases for 2006 came as army officials worked to set up a number of new and stronger programs for providing mental health care to a force strained by the longer-than-expected war in Iraq and the global counterterrorism war entering its sixth year.

Failed personal relationships, legal and financial problems and the stress of their jobs were factors motivating the soldiers to commit suicide, the report said.

"In addition, there was a significant relationship between suicide attempts and number of days deployed" in Iraq, Afghanistan or nearby countries where troops are participating in the war effort, it said. The same pattern seemed to hold true for those who not only attempted but succeeded in killing themselves.

There also "was limited evidence to support the view that multiple . . . deployments are a risk factor for suicide behaviours," it said. About one-quarter of those who killed themselves had a history of at least one psychiatric disorder. Of those, about 20 per cent had been diagnosed with a mood disorder such as bipolar disorder and/or depression and eight per cent had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder – one of the signature injuries of the conflict in Iraq.

Firearms were the most common method of suicide. Those who attempted suicide but didn't succeed tended more often to take overdoses and cut themselves.

In a service of more than a half-million troops, the 99 suicides amounted to a rate of 17.3 out of 100,000 – the highest in the last 26 years, the report said. The average rate over those years has been 12.3 out of 100,000.

The rate for those serving in the wars stayed about the same, 19.4 out of 100,000 in 2006, compared with 19.9 in 2005.

U.S. forces launch new offensive against al-Qaida in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.16

SECTION: World

PAGE: B8

COLUMN: Around the globe

SOURCE: AP

DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 62

Hundreds of U.S.-led troops have launched an offensive against al-Qaida and Taliban militants in an area of eastern Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden once hid, officials said Wednesday.

A bomb attack near the capital, meanwhile, killed three German police officers assigned to protect their country's embassy, and a British national was shot and killed in Kabul.

Tories have work to do after cabinet shuffle; Questions continue to swirl around Stephen Harper's next move on Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.16

SECTION: News

PAGE: A8

SOURCE: CP

DATELINE: Ottawa

WORD COUNT: 330

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It's "Craw-po" not "Crap-O"

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.08.16

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A6

WORD COUNT: 750

Editor:

I sent a letter recently to a television station in Halifax about the pronunciations of place and proper names. I frequently hear announcers mispronounce place and proper names. The one that prompted my letter to the television station was the pronunciation of Comeau.

I lived in New Brunswick for a few years and, for over 20 years, in Quebec. During that time I never heard Comeau pronounced other than "Como" until I heard this particular announcer call it "Come-o".

On Prince Edward Island, we have our own way of pronouncing some names. Blois is pronounced "Bloyce" and DeBlois, "DeBloyce". Gaudet is pronounced "Goody" by some if not all with that name. Another toughie is Dalziel which is pronounced "D-L" as if there were no letters between the first and last.

One that upsets me is how a lot of people pronounce Crapaud. The first "a" is pronounced as the "a" in salt, halt and Salisbury. It should be pronounced "Craw-po" rather than "Crap-O".

Bob Jardine, Stratford

Between Prime Minister Stephen Harper's own comments on his restructured cabinet, and the disposition of key players within it, it's not hard to guess where the future focus of his government lies. Prior to the last election, it was the well-canvassed five domestic points upon which he fought the 2006 election; now it appears more outward looking, with defence and foreign policy taking centre stage.

Certainly, it's the obvious inference from the new mandates handed out to Maxime Bernier, Peter MacKay and Jim Prentice in Tuesday's shuffle. Any team captain puts his best players where they'll do him the most good. Harper, therefore, must be assumed to be establishing conditions for successful future legislation, as preparation to fight an election around Afghanistan, foreign affairs and international trade, in as little as two years.

Take moving Peter MacKay to Defence, for instance. This works well from several angles. Thanks to Afghanistan and heavy procurement, Defence is hot, an unusual phenomenon in this peaceable dominion. There could hardly be better preparation for a Defence minister, than time well-spent in Foreign Affairs; MacKay cannot fail to have noticed how much diplomats need generals. It is now the articulate MacKay's job to push the government line – Canada must be in Afghanistan, but Parliament must agree.

That Harper trusts him with this sensitive task, works a second rope, reassuring restless Maritime Conservatives their man is still big enough to speak up for them about equalization. Plus, there's no downside giving the region's most prominent Conservative Defence, when 40 per cent of Canada's armed forces hail from the Maritimes.

For the Defence Department itself, it's a double score. They will be sad to see Gordon O'Connor go. For getting them money and equipment, he has had no recent equal. However, he's only moved to Revenue, in

more normal times thought a superior job to Defence.

So, not only has O'Connor been promoted, this strong military advocate remains at the cabinet table, where his voice will be heard.

It is moving Maxime Bernier from Industry to Foreign Affairs however, that is Harper's clearest signal of his wish to build international profile, for electoral use at home. To cast a long shadow abroad, a prime minister needs a strong foreign minister, one who can do deals for him to sign. The francophone Bernier, a former vice-president of the free-market Montreal Economic Institute, and as such a soulmate as much to French President Nicolas Sarkozy as to Harper, is to take that role.

Will Harper seek closer trade ties with Europe, a free-trade deal even? He hasn't said. But, when even U.S. Republicans embrace protection, the prospect of Democrats in the White House owing dues to labour suggests Washington's welcome mat won't be shaken for a while. If Harper wants to develop trade elsewhere, the smart, ideologically compatible Bernier is a good pick, as well as a nod to Quebec. Finally, Calgary's Jim Prentice and Diane Ablonczy must be smiling. Ablonczy because she's finally in, and Prentice because his good work at Indian Affairs earned him a dream job – Industry, the ministry in charge of Ottawa's Science and Technology Strategy, and a project Harper believes will come to the aid of his party. Whether this cabinet recalibration will, on its own, take the Conservatives into majority territory, is impossible to say. However, there's no doubt about what they think will sell in two years time, or less.

Calgary Herald editorial

U.S. launches offensive against al-Qaida

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.08.16

SECTION: International

PAGE: C10

SOURCE: AP

BYLINE: Rahim Faiez

DATELINE: Bagrami, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 268

Hundreds of U.S.-led troops have launched an offensive against al-Qaida and Taliban insurgents in eastern Afghanistan, while a bomb attack near the capital killed three German nationals, officials said Wednesday.

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The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting Osama bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 terror attacks on the United States. Bin Laden is believed to have escaped that assault.

"This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said in a statement released later Wednesday by the Pentagon.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or U.S. and Afghan troops.

Near the capital Kabul, meanwhile, a bomb attack near a two-vehicle convoy on Wednesday killed three German police officers and wounded a fourth, officials said.

The explosion near the convoy, which was travelling on an unpaved road about 10 kilometres southeast of Kabul, knocked one of the two vehicles on its side and left it badly damaged.

German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said the three Germans were police officers deployed to Afghanistan to protect the German Embassy. In a statement, he characterized the explosion as an "underhanded attack."

The officers apparently were on their way to a training session and were travelling in what Schaeuble described as a "particularly well-protected vehicle."

He said Germany's Federal Crime Office was sending experts to Afghanistan to help investigate the explosion.

Questions swirl around Harper's next move on Afghan strategy

PUBLICATION:	The Telegram (St. John's)
DATE:	2007.08.16
SECTION:	National
PAGE:	A8
SOURCE:	The Canadian Press
BYLINE:	Jim Brown
DATELINE:	Ottawa
ILLUSTRATION:	Maxime Bernier is sworn in as the new minister of Foreign Affairs as Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Gov.-Gen. Michaëlle Jean look on during a ceremony at Rideau Hall Tuesday. – Photo by The Canadian Press
WORD COUNT:	643

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Change must start at top

IDNUMBER 200708160071
PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Viewpoints
PAGE: B12
BYLINE: Barbara Yaffe
SOURCE: Vancouver Sun
WORD COUNT: 631

Stephen Harper recognizes the obvious: he needs to reinvent a governing team that is failing either to inspire or excite voters.

The problem is largely of his own making. As a well-recognized control freak, he's hogging the spotlight and is, well, a bit of a stiff. No charisma. Incapable of executing a kibitz. Thin skinned. And has a terrible rapport with the media.

So there Harper was on Tuesday, introducing cabinet changes that potentially could bolster Conservative popularity — that is, if the PM also changes his own behaviour.

Past experience shows cabinet rejigging alone never suffices to change the course of popularity trends. To date, Conservatives have not been able to nudge polling numbers to a point that would carry them beyond minority government standing.

Harper must drop the attitude and allow his ministers, especially the outgoing and capable ones, to do more of the talking.

He also needs to find a way to better pitch the Afghan military mission to the public, and reach out to women voters who have consistently given him the cold shoulder when the curtain is drawn in the polling booth.

The PM did himself no favours on the gender side Tuesday, with the new cabinet featuring just five females, instead of the six it had before. None of the five are in major portfolios or are particularly adept communicators. Indeed, one — Senator Marjorie LeBreton — doesn't even sit in the Commons.

Saskatchewan's Carol Skelton, who had served notice that she wouldn't be running in the next election, left the revenue portfolio, a junior ministry, open for a demoted Gordon O'Connor.

After a truly dismal performance, O'Connor finally got booted from defence. But notably, Harper, who doesn't ever like getting it wrong or admitting error, refused to ditch him entirely.

While talented Alberta MP Diane Ablonczy was promoted, to become secretary of state for tourism and small business, that isn't a full cabinet position.

Harper clearly cannot find women in Conservative ranks in whom he has confidence. The two highest-profile changes in cabinet involved Peter MacKay, who became defence minister, and Maxime Bernier who became foreign affairs minister.

MacKay's new job makes sense; so many military bases are located in his home region of Atlantic Canada. And MacKay has shown himself to be a good communicator. He's bound to do a better job than O'Connor in stickhandling the Afghanistan file.

Because so much of that responsibility requires bringing Quebecers onside, now that the Vandoos have joined the mission, it's anticipated that Bernier will share responsibilities in that province with MacKay, who continues working on his French.

The Bernier appointment, reflecting a promotion from his industry post, is a bit of a mystery given that Bernier — forever touted by Ottawa-watchers as a handsome guy and a great dresser — is not perceived to have accomplished all that much in his former department.

Other interesting moves put Jim Prentice into industry and former agriculture minister Chuck Strahl, an affable and informal chap who has never knowingly offended anyone in any way, into the always-sensitive Indian affairs portfolio.

Wisely, Harper did not try to mend what was not broken. He kept solidly performing ministers like Jim Flaherty in finance, John Baird in environment, Monte Solberg in human resources and Stockwell Day in public security, right where they were.

The cabinet shuffle should be seen as part of a broader strategy on the prime minister's part to inject political energy into his government at a time when it's looking as though — with the exception of exerting Canada's northern sovereignty — it's running out of ideas.

The famous five priorities with which the Harperites launched their governing stint in early 2006 have exhausted themselves.

Harper, instead of having Parliament resume as planned on Sept. 17, may well decide to prorogue the House and launch a whole new session of Parliament in October, replete with a throne speech setting forward a fresh set of objectives.

With no near-term election in sight, the prime minister will want to use the next year or so in his mahogany-panelled office injecting some badly-needed oomph into the Conservatives' governing program.

— Yaffe writes for the Vancouver Sun.

Questions swirl around Harper's next move on Afghan strategy

DATE: 2007.08.15

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 686

OTTAWA (CP) _ There's no doubt one of the key aims of Stephen Harper's cabinet shuffle was to strengthen the ministerial team in charge of the Afghanistan military mission.

What's not so clear is whether his decision to install Peter MacKay at defence and Maxime Bernier at foreign affairs signals a determination to stay the course or a subtle shift in agenda with an eye to the next election.

The uncertainty stems in large part from Harper's own declaration _ delivered in June, just as Parliament was recessing for the summer _ that he wouldn't keep Canadian combat troops in Afghanistan past February 2009 unless there's "some degree of consensus" that it's the right thing to do.,

Harper went on to make it clear he personally believes it's still the right thing. But his words were taken by many as an invitation to opposition parties to help revamp the mission in a way that would be more to their liking.

There have been no meetings since then with the Liberals, Bloc Quebecois or NDP in search of what the prime minister hopefully termed a "meeting of minds." Nor does it sound as if anybody is rushing to open negotiations in the wake of this week's shuffle.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion dismissed MacKay as a man who's already discredited on Afghan policy by his 18 months in the foreign affairs portfolio and denounced Bernier as "very right wing and close to the U.S. Republican approach."

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe offered much the same assessment and said he's "not very optimistic" about a change of course. NDP Leader Jack Layton simply reiterated his long-standing call to get the troops home as soon as possible.

Norman Spector, a former diplomat and chief of staff to Brian Mulroney, said the political dynamic of the current minority Parliament doesn't favour a statesmanlike, non-partisan approach. He believes, however, that Harper has no choice but to strike a deal with at least one opposition party if he wants to preserve some semblance of his Afghan policy.

The challenge is to "reconfigure" the mission in a way that both sides can live with, said Spector. The NDP likely could never be convinced to drop its outright opposition to the troop deployment, but the Liberals and Bloc could be more amenable.

Both those parties have acknowledged there's no alternative to continuing the mission until the end of the current term in 2009. They maintain that, if Canadian troops stay longer than that, they should pull back from combat role and spend more time on reconstruction, economic development projects and training of local forces.

If there's a deal to be struck, said Spector, "it's going to require tough negotiations. In the best of all possible worlds the other parties would respond to an olive branch from the government, but who knows?"

Alex Morrison, head of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, thinks the best bet for a deal is with the Liberals. Whether the Bloc signs on could depend on whether Bernier is successful in his assigned task of selling the mission to a Quebec public that has so far been skeptical.

“If Bernier does his job and raises the stock of the Conservative party in Quebec, then the Bloc might just have to hold their noses,” said Morrison.

He also believes that, even if Harper can't cut a deal, he may decide to make continuation of the mission a confidence matter and dare the opposition to bring him down and force an election.

“When he says we don't cut and run, he means it. I think he will go quite far to keep us in Afghanistan.”

Rob Huebert, a University of Calgary expert on defence policy, isn't so sure Harper would push the opposition to the wall. But he does think Harper is playing a political game with Dion and the Liberals as his chief targets.

The prime minister wins if Dion, whose party first sent troops to Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, relents in his current opposition and strikes a deal to keep them there.

If there's no deal, Harper's exit strategy is then to “wash his hands of the mission and blame the opposition,” said Huebert.

That could be a clever move in terms of short-term domestic politics, getting the issue off the table in time for the next election. But there could also be a longer-term strategic downside.

“Canada loses,” said Huebert. “Basically the Taliban has a victory.”

U.S. forces launch offensive against al-Qaida in eastern Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.08.15
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 493

BAGRAMI, Afghanistan (AP) _ Hundreds of U.S.-led troops have launched an offensive against al-Qaida and Taliban militants in an area of eastern Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden once hid, officials said Wednesday.

A bomb attack near the capital, meanwhile, killed three German police officers assigned to protect their country's embassy, and a British national was shot and killed in Kabul.

The offensive involving ground troops and air strikes in Tora Bora region of eastern Nangarhar province is targeting ``hundreds of foreign fighters" who are using dug-in fighting positions, said coalition spokeswoman Capt. Vanessa Bowman.

The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 attacks.

``This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said in a statement released later Wednesday by the Pentagon.

A U.S. official in Washington with knowledge of the operation said it was ``intelligence driven" and had been ``piggy-backed" on top of a previously planned action against extremists.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said it was not clear exactly who was being targeted, but that those believed to be in the area included Taliban officials who could be accompanied by some mid-level members of al-Qaida's leadership _ but not the top echelon.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or U.S. and Afghan troops.

Sensitive to criticism over rising civilian casualties in Afghanistan, U.S officials said they had carefully chosen targets for air strikes.

Around Kabul, the bomb that killed the three Germans wounded a fourth, officials said.

Also Wednesday, attackers in Kabul shot and killed a British man employed by a private security firm, according to the British Embassy and the firm.

Zemari Bashary, an Interior Ministry spokesman, said police arrested two Afghan men suspected in the slaying.

The suspects and victim were employees of ArmorGroup, a private security company protecting a number of Afghan and international clients, including the British Embassy in Kabul, Bashary said.

Separately, U.S.-led coalition and Afghan troops clashed with militants in central Logar province on Tuesday, killing nine suspected militants, the Interior Ministry said. No police or coalition troops were wounded in the clash, it said.

German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said the three Germans killed were police officers deployed to Afghanistan to protect the German Embassy. In a statement, he characterized the explosion as an ``underhanded attack."

The officers apparently were on their way to a training session and were travelling in what Schaeuble described as a ``particularly well-protected vehicle."

He said Germany's Federal Crime Office was sending experts to Afghanistan to help investigate the explosion.

The wounded officer, who did not suffer life-threatening injuries, was being treated by the German military at a base in Kabul.

The explosion near the two-vehicle convoy, which was travelling on an unpaved road about 10 kilometres southeast of Kabul, turned one of the two vehicles onto its side and left it badly damaged.

Afghanistan has suffered nearly three decades of civil war and conflict, and is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

Evangelicals join other Christian groups in push for common code on conversions

DATE: 2007.08.15

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL RELIGION SOCIAL

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 718

GENEVA (AP) _ Evangelical groups have joined efforts spearheaded by Roman Catholic, Orthodox and mainstream Protestant churches to create a common code for religious conversions.

The code would preserve the right of Christians to spread their religion while avoiding conflict among different faiths, church leaders say.

The World Council of Churches, which joined the Vatican last year in launching talks on a code, said Wednesday the process was formally joined by the World Evangelical Alliance at a meeting earlier this month in France.

The code aims to ease tensions with Muslims, Hindus and other religious groups which fear losing adherents, and which resort to punishments as extreme as imprisonment and even death for converts from their faith and foreign missionaries.

The Taliban kidnapping of 23 South Korean Christians and the killing of two of them in Afghanistan last month underscores the tensions.

The accusations against the South Koreans include wanting to meet with former converts from Islam, but the church has denied they were trying to spread Christianity. The hardline Islamic militants freed two women on Monday in a show of goodwill.

Proselytizing also has caused concern among the branches of Christianity because of the vigour with which Pentecostal and evangelical-style congregations have led the drive for conversions around the world, outstripping the growth of older churches.

Pope Benedict's visit to Brazil in May was partly a response to the exodus of millions of Catholics to Protestant evangelical churches.

Juan Michel, a spokesman for the Geneva-based WCC _ which brings together about 350 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 560 million Christians _ said the support from the evangelical alliance has given a big boost to efforts to agree on a set of guidelines by 2010.

“It is a very important Christian organization,” he said.

Major evangelical groups were absent from a meeting last year of the Vatican and the WCC near Rome, where the idea for the code was initiated.

But at the five-day meeting which ended Aug. 12 in Toulouse, France, Geoff Tunnicliffe, head of the evangelical alliance of 233 conservative Protestant church groups worldwide, gave his “full approval” to the process, the WCC said.

“The code of conduct is not about 'whether' Christians evangelize, but 'how' they do it,” said Rev. Tony Richie of the Church of God, a Pentecostal U.S.-based denomination, according to a WCC review of the meeting.

The next step in the process will be in 2008 when the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue meets its WCC counterpart to draft the guidelines.

The WCC said the code should establish what “needs to be banned when it comes to Christian mission, a daunting task given the many different contexts involved.” But it should also provide guidelines for dealing with complicated issues such as interreligious marriages, the WCC added.

John Langlois, an evangelical alliance board member, said there was great unity at the meeting, but insisted that any code would have to recognize the right of churches to preach the gospel around the world _ a point he said was strongly supported by the Vatican.

Sensitivity to Christian proselytizing is widespread among Muslims, who regard conversion from Islam as forbidden.

Last week, a religious court in Malaysia ordered a woman trying to renounce Islam to undergo three months of counselling in the mainly Muslim country's latest legal tussle over the issue.

In Egypt, a Muslim who converted to Christianity and then took the unprecedented step of seeking official recognition for the change said he had gone into hiding following death threats.

Last year, legislators in the western Indian state of Rajasthan made it the latest region in the country to outlaw proselytizing with punishments of up to five years in prison.

Critics claimed the laws will be used to target Christian missionaries, who are often denounced by Hindu nationalists. But Muslims _ who represent about 14 per cent of India's population _ also say the measures could be used against them.

The discussions over conversions could also spill into the religious politics of Asia, including the alleged persecution of “house churches” in places such as Vietnam and China.

The WCC said the code of conduct should serve as an “advocacy tool in discussions with governments considering anti-conversion laws (and) help to advance the cause of religious freedom.” The rules should also address concerns in other religions about Christians seeking converts, and inspire those faiths to “consider their own codes of conduct,” it added.

The council noted, however, that “none of the partners involved intend _ nor have the means _ to impose the code of conduct on their constituencies, but they all trust that it will be able to 'impact hearts and minds' and allow for 'moral and peer pressure.’”

Afghan-Cda-Tanks

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — A Canadian commander in Afghanistan says roadside bombs will remain a hazard despite the arrival of new, heavy-duty tanks.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stephane Lafaut says the Taliban are unlikely to target the tanks — preferring to save their improvised bombs for more vulnerable vehicles.

Canada is leasing 20 Leopard-2 tanks to replace the 30-year-old Leopard-1 models now in use.

Roadside bombs have killed 22 of the 26 Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan over the past six months.

Many were travelling in the LAV-3, Nyala and Bison armoured vehicles used on the Canadian mission.

The last attack against a Leopard tank was July 10th and injured two soldiers.

Still, Lafaut believes the new tanks will make a difference in the field because they project an image of strength.

(CP)

sw

Afghan–Violence–Update (Three German police officers killed)

DATE: 2007.08.15

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 86

BERLIN — Three German police officers have been killed in an attack in Afghanistan.

They were travelling in a convoy on an unpaved road southeast of Kabul when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb.

A fourth officer was injured.

The German interior minister in Berlin says the officers had been deployed to protect the German Embassy and were apparently on their way to a training session.

He adds that they were travelling in a "particularly well-protected vehicle" at the time of today's blast.

Germany has some three thousand troops serving in NATO's International Security Assistance Force, mostly in Afghanistan's relatively calm north.

(APV)

mcw

Foreign affairs role fades further

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A15
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 549

Ottawa There was a time when the russet, sphinx-like building known here as Fort Pearson was home to giants. Men and, yes, women towered over their peers, revelled in the world's nuanced complexity and considered the office overlooking the Ottawa and Rideau rivers a privilege as well as a reward.

It's tempting to say that era ended this week with the promotion of Maxime Bernier to foreign affairs. After all, at just 44 and with less than two years political experience, Bernier is a curious choice for a portfolio that historically ranks just below that of prime minister.

But Stephen Harper's senior Quebec minister isn't a break with tradition, he's part of an emerging continuum. The proof is his predecessor. Peter MacKay was not in any meaningful sense Canada's foreign minister. Relegated to the supporting cast, he was dominated by yet another prime minister who seized and held the significant international files.

As it turns out, that was a good thing. Even as an understudy, MacKay's performance was problematic. Gobsnacked by Condoleezza Rice and geographically challenged, the man Harper pushed onto the global stage too often displayed inexperience. He made a mess of a 2006 hostage crisis involving Canadian aid workers in Iraq, and earlier this month wrongly declared Canadian sovereignty over the North Pole.

Nobody's perfect and successful politicians learn. So it's hoped that what foreign affairs taught MacKay will make him more knowledgeable at defence. Still, it's a long spiral down from Lester B. Pearson to MacKay and now Bernier.

Beyond peacekeeping and the Nobel Prize, Pearson personified the utility of a creative, modest power. Foreign affairs is so soaked in that culture, so conscious of its attraction to the brightest that eyebrows arched in 2002 when Jean Chretien chose Bill Graham.

Those concerns now seem ludicrous. Eloquent in French as well as English, Graham taught international law and chaired Parliament's foreign affairs committee before becoming minister.

Bernier struggles in English, has an economic background and was first elected last year. The argument is that none of that matters much. Harper will handle vital U.S. relations and his acolyte will be as carefully controlled as cabinet colleagues.

Still, there's more to the decline and fall of a once proud department. In keeping with his disdain for diplomats and their tiny shrimp canapes, this Prime Minister sees the military as a more effective instrument to project a foreign policy that's increasingly shaped by domestic politics. That, of course, is where Bernier fits. His mandate as Harper's senior francophone is to sell Conservatives to Quebecers. That means marketing an unpopular Afghanistan mission and coping with expectations that this government will treat the province as

more of an equal internationally.

Bernier is better suited to those roles than restoring either prestige to Fort Pearson or coherence to Canadian actions offshore. Suave, even a bit of a dandy, he leaves industry with a reputation as ideologically rigid, not particularly well read, and ultimately less than meets the eye.

That's not what's needed at foreign affairs. A strong minister with a broad perspective is required to lead a department struggling to demonstrate that its expertise and network connections are priceless assets in world where almost every issue is global.

Instead, the pattern repeats and the giants galumph into memory.

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

Stop muddling Afghan file, Ottawa is warned; Military experts say Canadians won't be won over unless government is more open, stresses progress

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BYLINE: bruce campion-smith
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Stephen Harper's new messengers on the military mission in Afghanistan aren't likely to win over Canadians unless they're able to deliver a more coherent case about the reasons for the mission, one that stresses Canada's development work, military experts say.

One group is calling on the government to begin regular briefings – as often as once a week – with senior defence and foreign affairs officials to help Canadians better understand the situation in Afghanistan.

"The government needs to do better," said retired Col. Alain Pellerin, of the Conference of Defence Associations, a pro-military lobby group based in Ottawa.

"We're starting to do construction on the ground. We're starting to build a capability for the future. That's the message the government has to repeat constantly to the media and the population."

Analysts cite the government's muddled signals until now as one big reason that Canadians are divided on the reasons for the mission and questioning whether the progress has been worth the price.

But Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his aides clearly want that to change with this week's appointment of Peter MacKay as defence minister and Maxime Bernier as foreign affairs minister, two articulate ambassadors who can make the case for the mission, in both French and English.

Yet behind the scenes, the government had started shaking up its Afghan message machine even before Tuesday's cabinet shuffle. Earlier this year, senior foreign affairs official David Mulroney was given the task of co-ordinating government efforts in Afghanistan.

Pellerin says Mulroney, along with senior officials from other government agencies in Afghanistan, should be conducting regular briefings in Canada to explain the reason for the mission and the progress made so far.

"Having regular briefings to the media, not just when you have bad news to report but more importantly when there's progress to report," Pellerin said yesterday.

The foreign affairs department has held a few briefings in Ottawa but there were deemed to be "off the record," with reporters forbidden from identifying the names of the speakers and even the government agencies they worked for.

Stop muddling Afghan file, Ottawa is warned; Military experts say Canadians won't be won over unless gove

Just a few weeks ago, Gen. Rick Hillier, the chief of defence staff, told the Star that support for the Afghan mission would jump significantly if Canadians better understood the mission.

Indeed, opinion polling done by the defence department showed that the government could significantly boost support for the Afghan mission if it were to emphasize diplomacy and human rights.

But retired general Lewis MacKenzie fears it's too late to convince Canadians about the merits of the Afghan mission.

"You have to consider the audience and the audience in the vast majority of cases has its mind made up. That's the problem," MacKenzie said. "I don't think anybody can turn the message around."

Defence job a 'poisoned pill'; Harper has neutralized a potential rival by handing MacKay a political hot potato

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ILLUSTRATION: Fred Chartrand CP Peter MacKay arrives at Rideau Hall in Ottawa, where he was sworn in as the new defence minister after losing the foreign affairs portfolio. ;
BYLINE: Tonda MacCharles
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 548

The soldier who stumbled is gone. Gordon O'Connor's stiff military demeanour served neither him nor his prime minister well.

In O'Connor's place as Canada's new defence minister: rugby-loving Nova Scotian, Peter MacKay.

MacKay, in a flack jacket, looks like he stepped out of a Canadian Forces recruiting ad – the modern soldier, a steep contrast to O'Connor's image as a somewhat gruff old general.

It was instantly clear Prime Minister Stephen Harper chose the 41-year-old MacKay for the job because of his communication skills.

At ease in front of microphones and cameras, the gregarious former Progressive Conservative leader and deputy leader of the Conservative Party will be a far better spokesperson for why Canada is on the frontlines in Afghanistan. That will be key to the political debate on whether to extend Canada's military commitment beyond February 2009.

It's also clear that it will allow MacKay more time in Canada, instead of on the international circuit, so he'll be able to pay more attention to domestic political needs: his own – he faces a big challenge in his Central Nova riding from Green Party Leader Elizabeth May in the next federal election – and his party's.

The Conservatives need to recoup lost support in Atlantic Canada, where the bitter budget dispute in the spring over federal wealth-sharing has badly hurt them. Having MacKay – a high-profile minister – spend more time on the ground there will boost party fortunes.

And yes, military roots and infrastructure are spread broad and deep in that part of the country, and MacKay – the local boy – will be a source of pride for the troops, their families, their neighbours and friends.

But it's also clear that in moving him to defence, traditionally a less powerful post than foreign affairs, Harper has his own best interests in mind.

MacKay, still viewed by many as a potential leadership rival for Harper, has been effectively demoted.

Defence job a 'poisoned pill'; Harper has neutralized a potential rival by handing MacKay a political hot potato

Yes, he still shares responsibility for one of the government's hottest files – the war – but if his efforts are successful, the Prime Minister will still claim the credit.

And if MacKay, a former small-town prosecutor, had a steep learning curve on the foreign affairs file, he has an even bigger career challenge in front of him now surviving defence.

"It has been the end of most political ambitions beyond being a minister in some cabinet," says Doug Bland, chair of defence studies at Queen's University, and author of a book on Canada's military leadership.

"Nobody gets to be anything of importance after they become defence minister because they are so vulnerable to scandals, mishaps ... It's been a poisoned pill for most people of ambition."

In one respect, MacKay is fortunate. Bland believes a lot of the hard internal policy and budget battles have been fought and won – by O'Connor.

O'Connor overrode Gen. Rick Hillier's vision of the Canadian Forces as a light, rapid response force, and spent billions buying new transport planes, tanks and ships, while making good on the Conservatives' promise to boost the military presence in the Arctic. An added bonus: morale in the forces, and public support for the troops, is generally good.

In another respect, MacKay, a charming, tough-minded Nova Scotian may have met his match in Hillier, the charming, tough-minded Newfoundlander.

It's likely the two will get along, at first.

But the real test will come as they get closer to a make-or-break decision for both men: whether Canadian Forces will remain in Afghanistan past 2009. It is a dilemma fraught with professional implications for Hillier and political implications for the Prime Minister and MacKay.

When that time comes, MacKay will be the one caught in the crossfire between Hillier and Harper.

Same old story in cabinet

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PAGE: AA07
ILLUSTRATION: Sean Kilpatrick CP Photo Maxime Bernier, right, arrives at RideauHall on Tuesday to be sworn in as the new foreign affairs minister. Bernier is a former insurance executive. ;
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 519

MacKay's hardest mission

Aug. 15

It couldn't matter less who plays what role; the agenda remains the same. This is a smoke-and-mirrors effort to change an increasingly disillusioned public perception that this government is not what Canadians want. What fair-minded citizen wants to see \$3.5 billion spent on four C-17 aircraft, while Indian Affairs says it is unable to afford to give the people of Kashechewan decent homes in a new location?

And what about Afghanistan? Use some of that money to load the first plane right now with food, medicine and shelter materials, and airlift them to Afghanistan. Withdraw all Canadian troops from search-and-kill missions, and have them strictly defend and protect the areas where infrastructure and construction are taking place.

Forget the cabinet card game. Concentrate on aid, not war, and restore the reputation of Canadians and this blessed land.

Shirley Bush, Toronto

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's removal of Gordon O'Connor as defence minister is the right thing to do, but there will be no fundamental change with Peter MacKay in charge. Since coming to power, Harper's obsession with U.S.-style combat and counter-insurgency has only led to an increase in support for the Taliban, a massive expansion of poppy and heroin production, and a general deterioration in security and basic development and well-being for Afghans.

Only a sweeping change in government and policy, both here and in Afghanistan, will lead to real peace, security and development.

David Fox, Toronto

Half of Canada lacks clout

in cabinet

Aug. 15

There is a glaring lack of female representation in Stephen Harper's government, where women make up only 22 per cent of the cabinet and 0 per cent of the ministers in priority areas. While Canada's international ranking on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's list of women in national parliaments has slipped to 47th, the government appears to have little interest in addressing this imbalance.

Increasing the number of female role models in cabinet would encourage more women to get involved in politics. Addressing the media's treatment of female politicians would help to keep them there. And, since countries using some form of proportional representation typically elect more females than those using the first-past-the-post system, Canada is ready for electoral reform.

Harper needs to do more than shuffle his men if he wants the support of women voters.

Jessica Ward, Toronto

Just a point of reference regarding the issue of gender representation in Stephen Harper's new cabinet. Fourteen of the 125 Conservative MPs are women and Harper's new cabinet includes seven women. That means 50 per cent of the elected female Conservative caucus is sitting at the cabinet table.

For Liberal candidate Martha Hall Findlay to say that Harper is putting them in "pink portfolios" is an insult to these women.

Blair Johnston, Mississauga

Harper's shuffle fails to impress

Editorial, Aug. 15

The new minister of foreign affairs, Maxime Bernier, represents Canada on the world stage. He should be an expert in the field of international relations. It is much easier to sell an insurance policy than to design and implement a successful foreign policy, especially at a time when Canada is playing a more active role in international affairs. Experience and a deep understanding of diplomacy should be prerequisites for this important job.

Mehdi Rizvi, Pickering

Churches to set rules on proselytizing; Christian code of conduct for seeking converts would aim to ease tensions with other religions

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WORD COUNT: 356

Roman Catholic and other Christian churches will start drafting a code of conduct guiding efforts to seek religious converts next year, the World Council of Churches said yesterday.

The council, which groups the main Protestant and Orthodox faiths, and the Vatican are aiming to finalize a code by 2010, the council said in a statement.

The issue has come to the fore in recent years in Afghanistan, where 23 South Koreans who were on an evangelical mission in the fervently Muslim country were abducted by the Taliban last month.

The ethical code is partly intended to address concerns by other religions about Christian proselytizing, according to the council.

But it is also meant to help advance religious freedom and inspire similar guidelines by other religions, it added.

The council said a network of evangelical churches in 128 countries, the World Evangelical Alliance, announced at a meeting of theologians and church leaders in France last week that it supports the effort to set up a code of conduct.

The issue of how far religions or churches can go to encourage or seek out converts commands considerable disagreement even among the various currents of Christianity.

The participants in the French meeting highlighted the need for a common understanding of conversion or missionary work, a distinction between "aggressive proselytizing" and evangelism, and a balance between the mandate to evangelize and the right to choose one's religion, the council said.

A code should also establish what all partners agree must be banned, but the council warned that it would be a "daunting task."

"Although these are very preliminary findings, the fact that representatives from all these walks of Christian life have been able to meet and discuss such a complex issue, starting to build a consensus, is in itself a success," said Reverend Hans Ucko, the council's senior official dealing with interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

The next step will be the meeting in 2008 of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council's similar body, to begin drafting the code.

Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and indigenous religious traditions were invited to play an active part in the process when it was launched in 2006.

Controversies in recent years that sparked the initiative include the arrest of a Christian convert from Islam, Adbul Rahman, in Afghanistan in 2006 on charges of apostasy, and the role of evangelical "crusades" in India and Sri Lanka.

Too few women in Harper cabinet

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KEYWORDS: 0
BYLINE: Ali Jonzon
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 108

Re: "Cabinet shuffled as Tories gird for battle over Afghanistan; Top gun Peter MacKay moved to defence from foreign affairs," The Journal, Aug. 15.

It is clear that Prime Minister Stephen Harper is stuck in his old fashioned, conservative ways of under-representing the voice of women. In his latest cabinet shuffle, female representation remains at 22 per cent — the same ratio as his last two cabinets. Not only that, the female ministers that do exist are not in portfolios identified as priorities for Harper, and few are even frontline ministers.

What is he trying to say to Canadian women?

Frankly, I think it's scary how old-fashioned his message continues to be.

Ali Jonzon, Edmonton

Tory cabinet shuffle mostly self-serving; If all politics are local, then Harper's rationale was to shore up regional support

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DATE: 2007.08.16
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SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A16
COLUMN: L. Ian MacDonald
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Ottawa Citizen, CanWest News Service / Chuck Strahl, left, Peter MacKay, Gordon O'Connor, Bev Oda, Jim Prentice and Maxime Bernier take part in Tuesday's swearing-in ceremony held at Rideau Hall. ;
KEYWORDS: PRIME MINISTERS; POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA
BYLINE: L. Ian MacDonald
SOURCE: The Montreal Gazette
WORD COUNT: 629

There are two faces to government: the prime minister and the cabinet, the leader and the team. The leader can't do it all, as Stephen Harper acknowledged yesterday in shuffling his team.

He was hoping to present an improved team with sharper communications skills on difficult national files, notably the Afghanistan mission. Many of the newly promoted ministers will also play a larger role in the retail politics of their regions.

Thus, Peter MacKay, from Foreign Affairs to Defence, and Maxime Bernier, from Industry to Foreign Affairs, and Jim Prentice, from Indian Affairs to Industry.

MacKay and Bernier will be the lead advocates of the Afghanistan mission both nationally and at home, while Prentice will take charge of the important regulatory review at Industry and remain as chair of the Cabinet Operations Committee, effectively as chief operating officer of the Harper government.

Their immediate task is to improve the Conservatives' stalled fortunes and their prospects for re-election any time between this fall and October 2009, when a bill for fixed elections will kick in if the government doesn't fall in the meantime.

But MacKay, Bernier and Prentice would be three leading candidates in any eventual Conservative leadership race to succeed Harper. Yesterday, the prime minister advanced the careers of all three. And all three chose to be sworn into their new portfolios in both English and French. And in every case, their second language, like their leadership networks, is a work in progress.

How their careers will progress, and their prospects for advancement to the top, will depend very much on how they do in their new portfolios.

MacKay is a logical fit for Defence in the Atlantic, the region of the country where support for the Afghan mission runs highest. Bernier is an obvious advocate for the mission in Quebec, where support for it is weakest. And Prentice has work to do in Calgary, where the natives are restless over income trusts.

Tip O'Neill was right: all politics are local. Or in Canada, at least regional.

MacKay assumes a portfolio with a huge presence in the Atlantic, notably the army base Gagetown in New Brunswick, and the naval base in Halifax in MacKay's province of Nova Scotia.

And significantly, MacKay remains minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, which cuts a lot of important cheques in the region.

Moreover, at Defence, MacKay will be touring those military installations and selling the Conservatives' commitment to renewing the Forces after decades of neglect by previous governments.

Not to put too fine a point on it, Defence is a job that will keep MacKay home, mending Tory fences that have been badly frayed by the dispute between the feds and Newfoundland and Nova Scotia over equalization and the offshore.

In Foreign Affairs, MacKay travelled the world. But that doesn't cut much with the voters of Upper, Middle and Lower Musquodobit, who are far less interested in arms-control talks with the Russians than in the economic of their part of the country.

As for Bernier, it is clear he will be the primary defender of the Afghan mission, in Quebec. There hasn't been anyone on this file, except for Josée Verner at the Canadian International Development Agency, who could make the case for it on French-language television.

But beyond Afghanistan, there are local issues that can be advanced by Bernier's move from Industry to the high profile of Foreign Affairs.

For one thing, there are three Quebec byelections coming up on Sept. 17, two of them off the island of Montreal, where the Conservatives hope to be competitive with the Bloc. And then there's Quebec 2008, and the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec.

The world will be coming to Quebec in 2008, and the Conservatives hope to capitalize on it with a strong federal presence.

When dignitaries from around the world come to Quebec, Maxime Bernier will be greeting them on the tarmac and toasting them at banquets at the Chateau Frontenac. And when he's not available, Josée Verner will be there in her new role as Heritage minister.

All politics are local.

Even cabinet shuffles.

L. Ian MacDonald writes for the Montreal Gazette

U.S. 'ups ante' against Iran; Declares country's Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization

IDNUMBER 200708160006
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A3
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Agence France–Presse; Getty Images / In a file picture dated October 20, 2006, Iranian Revolutionary Guards, one of them covering his chest with a portrait of Lebanon's Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, take part in a demonstration held in Tehran to mark Jerusalem (Al–Quds) Day. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 718

WASHINGTON – A U.S. decision to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a foreign terrorist organization fuelled speculation Wednesday the White House is laying the groundwork for air strikes against the hardline Islamic nation before President George W. Bush leaves office.

Foreign policy analysts were surprised Wednesday by the reported White House decision, which would mark the first time in history that the U.S. has formally declared the armed forces of a sovereign nation to be terrorists.

"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. air force colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge. Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state."

In Crawford, Texas, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any possible actions" the U.S. is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard, an elite military force that operates outside Iran's regular army.

But several high–ranking U.S. officials, in strategic leaks to media outlets, said Bush has already made a decision to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group which threatens American security and economic interests.

The administration could formally announce the move as early as next month ahead of United Nations Security Council meetings in New York, when the U.S. will seek tougher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

The U.S. military has also repeatedly accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard, particularly its covert al–Quds Force, of supplying weapons to aid Shiite insurgents fighting American troops in Iraq.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard "is well-known to be engaged in" terrorist activities and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

"We are confronting Iran's behaviour in arming and providing material support to those groups that are going after our troops," McCormack.

The Revolutionary Guard operates its own naval, land and air forces independently from Iran's regular armed forces, but has expanded its domestic operations recently to include commercial ventures ranging from oil production to infrastructure projects.

The expected designation of the Revolutionary Guard would allow the U.S. to freeze any financial assets the force has with U.S. companies, but a larger goal is to ramp up pressure on international firms to cut ties with Iran.

The plan is reportedly the brainchild of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and is thought to be aimed at showing Bush administration hawks -- particularly Vice-President Dick Cheney -- that the State Department is ready to take a more unilateral, confrontational approach with Iran if diplomacy fails.

A formal designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as terrorists could also provide Bush political cover should he decide on future military strikes inside Iran, allowing the White House to contend attacks were approved under the post-9/11 congressional authorization for war against terror groups.

"If the U.S. had decided on the Cheney option, this is what we would do as a way of preparing for it," Gardiner said in an interview. "The new Cheney option includes air strikes against terrorist training camps inside Iran."

Officials in Tehran initially scoffed at news of the Washington's plan.

"Such a report is in the framework of the propaganda and psychological activity of the American administration against the Islamic Republic of Iran," a senior Iranian official said told IRNA, the country's official news agency.

Some analysts said the U.S. move to escalate tensions with Iran could backfire, making it more difficult to reach a negotiated agreement on disputes over nuclear energy and Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Rather than cowing Iran into backing down, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is just as likely to respond by stepping up its anti-U.S. activities in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, Gardiner believes.

"There are some within the (Bush) administration who believe the only reason the Iranians are not behaving is that they don't believe we are serious," he said. "The problem is that it misunderstands the Iranians. The Iranians understand we are serious but are not going to be pushed around."

Even as news of the new U.S. tactic emerged, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced his force's missiles are now capable of striking targets throughout the Persian Gulf.

Yahya Rahim Safavi, the Guard's commander-in-chief, warned no rival warships could pass through the region's waters without risk of being struck by Iranian weapons.

Battle for Iraq: fight or flight?; Should we battle terrorism and al-Qaida in Iraq and Afghanistan or just ignore it and hope it will go away?

IDNUMBER 200708160041
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A15
COLUMN: Christopher Hitchens
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CanWest News Service / A U.S. soldier walks past a painting inside a school his unit visited during a patrol in Baghdad this week. ;
KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; WAR; INVESTIGATIONS
BYLINE: Christopher Hitchens
SOURCE: Vanity Fair and Slate Magazine
WORD COUNT: 981

Over the past few months, I have been debating Roman Catholics who differ from their Eastern Orthodox brethren on the nature of the Trinity, with Protestants who are willing to quarrel bitterly with one another about election and predestination, with Jews who cannot concur about a covenant with God and with Muslims who harbor bitter disagreements over the discrepant interpretations of the Koran.

Arcane as these disputes may seem, and much as I relish seeing the faithful fight among themselves, the believers are models of lucidity when compared to the hair-splitting secularists who cannot accept that al-Qaida in Mesopotamia is a branch of al-Qaida itself.

Objections to this self-evident fact take one of two forms.

It is argued, first, that there was no such organization before the coalition intervention in Iraq. It is argued, second, that the character of the gang itself is somewhat autonomous from, and even independent of, the original group proclaimed by Osama bin Laden. These objections sometimes, but not always, amount to the suggestion that the "real" fight against al-Qaida is, or should be, not in Iraq but in Afghanistan.

The facts as we have them are not at all friendly to this view of the situation, whether it be the "hard" view that al-Qaida terrorism is a "resistance" to Western imperialism or the "soft" view that we have only created the monster in Iraq by intervening there.

The founder of al-Qaida in Mesopotamia was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who we can now gratefully describe as "the late." He was in Iraq before we were. He fled to Iraq only because he, and many others like him, had been driven out of Afghanistan. Thus, by the logic of those who say that Afghanistan is the "real" war, he would have been better left as he was. Without the overthrow of the Taliban, he and his collaborators would not have moved to take advantage of the next failed/rogue state.

I hope you can spot the simple error of reasoning that is involved in this belief. It also involves the defeatist suggestion -- which was very salient in the opposition to the intervention in Afghanistan -- that it's pointless to try to crush such people because "others will spring up in their place." Those who take this view should

have the courage to stand by it and not invent a straw-man argument.

As it happens, we also know that Zarqawi — who probably considered himself a rival to bin Laden as well as an ally — wrote from Iraq to bin Laden and to his henchman Ayman al-Zawahiri and asked for the local "franchise" to call himself the leader of AQM. This dubious honour he was duly awarded. We further know that he authored a plan for the wrecking of the new Iraq: A simple strategy to incite civil murder between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The incredible evil of this proposal, which involved the blowing up of holy places and the assassination of pilgrims, was endorsed from whatever filthy cave these deliberations are conducted in.

As a matter of fact, we even know that Zawahiri and his boss once or twice counseled Zarqawi to hold it down a bit, especially on the video-butchery and the excessive zeal in the murder of Shiites. Thus, if there is any distinction to be made between the apple and the tree, it would involve saying that AQM is, if anything, even more virulent and sadistic than its parent body.

And this very observation leads to a second one, which has been well-reported and observed by journalists who are highly skeptical about the invasion. In provinces like Anbar, and in areas of Baghdad, even Sunni militants have turned away in disgust and fear from the AQM forces. It's not difficult to imagine why this is: Try imagining life for a day under the village rule of such depraved and fanatical elements.

To say that the attempt to Talibanize Iraq would not be happening at all if coalition forces were not present is to make two unsafe assumptions and one possibly suicidal one. The first assumption is that the vultures would never have gathered to feast on the decaying cadaver of the Saddamist state, a state that was in a process of implosion well before 2003. All our experience of countries like Somalia and Sudan, and indeed of Afghanistan, argues that such an assumption is idiotic. It is in the absence of international attention that such nightmarish abnormalities flourish.

The second assumption is that the harder we fight them, the more such cancers metastasize. This appears to be contradicted by all the experience of Iraq. Fallujah or Baqubah might already have become the centres of an ultra-Taliban minstate, as they at one time threatened to do, whereas now not only have thousands of AQM goons been killed but local opinion appears to have shifted decisively against them and their methods.

The third assumption, deriving from the first two, would be that if coalition forces withdrew, the AQM gangsters would lose their *raison d'être* and have nothing left to fight for. I think I shall just leave that assumption lying where it belongs: On the damp floor of whatever asylum it is where foolish and wishful opinions find their eventual home.

If I am right about this, an enormous prize is within our reach. We can not only deny the clones of bin Ladenism a military victory in Iraq, we can also discredit them in the process and in the eyes (and with the help) of a Muslim people who have seen them up close. We can do this, moreover, in a keystone state of the Arab world that guards a chokepoint — the Gulf — in the global economy.

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair and Slate Magazine, where this column originally appeared.

U.S. poised to brand Iran forces terrorist; Speculation mounts air strikes could follow designation

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PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Agence France–Presse, Getty Images / Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard, participating in military exercises last year, "is well-known to be engaged in" terrorist activities, says U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. ; Photo: Agence France–Presse, Getty Images / Iran's Revolutionary Guard participates in military manoeuvres last year. ; Photo: Condoleezza Rice ;

KEYWORDS: WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 657

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"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. air force colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge. Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state."

In Crawford, Tex., White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any possible actions" the U.S. is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard, an elite military force that operates outside Iran's regular army.

But several high-ranking U.S. officials, in strategic leaks to media outlets, said Bush has already made a decision to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group which threatens American security and economic interests.

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Iran's Revolutionary Guard "is well-known to be engaged in" terrorist activities and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. "We are confronting Iran's behaviour in arming and providing material support to those groups that are going after our troops."

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"The problem is that it misunderstands the Iranians.

"The Iranians understand we are serious, but are not going to be pushed around."

MacKay plays defence

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PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
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EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
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BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 268

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says it's business as usual despite this week's cabinet shuffle, but clearly it is not.

Replacing Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor with Peter MacKay from foreign affairs is an acknowledgement, finally, that Canada's role in Afghanistan needs to be better communicated to the Canadian people.

But Harper knows better communication alone, however helpful, will not do the job. Canadians need a broader debate about our continuing role and objectives in Afghanistan.

The original goal of defeating the Taliban was long ago squandered when the United States opened a second front in Iraq. It's too late now to expect anything so definitive anytime soon.

Reducing casualties is also worthy, but that too, is a challenge indeed as long as Canada remains in the Kandahar region, which it will be until at least 2009.

Harper has said he will not extend that without support from all parties, and a Commons vote on the question may come as early as next spring.

Sometime between now and then, Canadians need to decide more clearly what we expect from our troops and other organizations and what we as a country believe we owe Afghanistan — and indeed the rest of the world.

The obstacles are many. Afghanistan has a long history of being ungovernable. Warlords, tribal leaders, corruption, poppy production and a strengthening Taliban all work against any acceptable solution in the near future.

Canada, despite the best of intentions, is increasingly seen by many in Afghanistan as part of the problem rather than the solution.

Are diplomacy and development taking a back seat to defence? Are military and development activities as co-ordinated and communicated as they can be? Is aid being delivered effectively?

Is it time for another direction altogether?

It's fine to say we support our troops and are committed to the Afghans, but commitment includes a fulsome debate, a re-evaluation of the entire operation, a clear understanding of the risks and a goal we can all comprehend.

That is the challenge for the new cabinet.

U.S. targets Taliban in Tora Bora region

SOURCETAG 0708160543
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 8
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 194

Hundreds of U.S.-led troops have launched an offensive against al-Qaida and Taliban insurgents in eastern Afghanistan, while a bomb attack near the capital killed three German nationals, officials said yesterday.

The offensive involving ground troops and air strikes in the Tora Bora region of eastern Nangarhar province is targeting "hundreds of foreign fighters" who are battling from dug-in positions, coalition spokesman Capt. Vanessa Bowman said.

The remote mountainous area bordering Pakistan was heavily bombarded in late 2001 by U.S. troops hunting Osama bin Laden and his associates following the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

'AIMED AT TERRORIZING'

"This region has provided an ideal environment to conceal enemy support bases and training sites, as well as plan and launch attacks aimed at terrorizing innocent civilians, both inside and outside the region," Bowman said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties among militants or troops.

Near Kabul, meanwhile, a bomb attack targeting a two-vehicle convoy yesterday killed three German police officers and wounded a fourth, officials said.

The explosion near the convoy, which was travelling on an unpaved road about 10 km southeast of Kabul, knocked one of the two vehicles on its side and left it badly damaged.

A German official said the three Germans were in Afghanistan to protect the German Embassy.

Also yesterday, attackers shot and killed a British national in Kabul, the British Embassy said. Two Afghan men were arrested.

The suspects and victim were employees of a private security company, ArmorGroup.

Afghan 'tag team' ready Harper expects MacKay, Bernier to better explain mission

SOURCETAG 0708160540

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SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of PETER MACKAY Takes over from O'Connor 2. photo of MAXIME BERNIER Must do PR job in Quebec

BYLINE: ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

WORD COUNT: 299

Call them the Kandahar Kids. Or maybe the Kabul Bulldogs.

Canada's newly shuffled ministers of foreign affairs and defence are a tag-team duo intended to lift the country's Afghanistan mission out from the trenches of public opinion, several observers say.

"It's all about Afghanistan," said Rob Huebert, associate director of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.

"The biggest criticism with (former defence minister Gordon) O'Connor was that he wasn't getting the message across." SES Research pollster Nik Nanos said the combination of Nova Scotia's Peter MacKay moving to defence from foreign affairs and Quebec's Maxime Bernier filling the foreign affairs role gives Prime Minister Stephen Harper proven communicators from two important regions of the country.

Bernier will be expected to sell the Afghanistan mission in his home province, where it is the least popular among Canadians.

HIGH PROPORTION

Atlantic Canada, meanwhile, supplies a high proportion of the soldiers overseas, said Nanos.

"All the other cabinet movements were just a collateral result of the need to get the messaging better on Afghanistan," he said.

The moves were announced in a 10-person cabinet shuffle on Tuesday afternoon and come at a time when public opinion seems reluctant to significantly favour either the governing Conservatives or opposition Liberals over the other.

But Steven Staples of the Rideau Institute on International Affairs echoed Opposition party concerns that the shuffle offers no substantial policy shift that would kick-start Harper's hopes for a majority.

"It was a huge missed opportunity for the prime minister," said Staples. "By not taking advantage of this he's climbing back off the lifeboat and onto the deck of the Titanic."

Liberal foreign affairs critic Ujjal Dosanjh said the messengers make little difference when the decisions continue to be made in the PMO.

The first minister to land on the hot seat in his new portfolio was Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl.

He came under fire from the Liberals yesterday for comments reported in news stories when he was a Reform Party MP. In one article, Strahl is quoted as describing a native band as having "scalped" gravel from the land.

Liberal Indian affairs critic Anita Neville called the comments "anti-aboriginal" and demanded Strahl renounce the remarks. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL; WORLD

O'Connor's defence term not a bumbling disaster

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SECTION: Editorial/Opinion

PAGE: 21

BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON, TORONTO SUN

WORD COUNT: 467

Although Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cabinet shuffle is aimed more at reviving public confidence in his leadership than improving the country, an uneasy reality is that it's unlikely to do either.

That's a fact of cabinet shuffles, regardless of which party is in power.

For the ministers shuffled, however, it's a chance to start over.

Incoming ministers to a portfolio are excused for a while from answering questions or knowing what's going on — and have instant amnesia about the portfolio from which they've been switched.

If that sounds cynical, well, it's the truth. And it's politics.

Most of the attention in this shift has been directed at defence, where Gordon O'Connor, a former regular force brigadier-general, was generally viewed as having stumbled, failing to articulate the message of Afghanistan (whatever it is), and was seen as being uncomfortable and distrustful of the media (that's a failing?).

That he's being replaced by Peter MacKay is hardly cause for joy. Maybe someday, but not yet. MacKay in foreign affairs was, in essence, a know-nothing. Not his background. What he knows about the military probably equals his knowledge of foreign matters when the Tories formed the government.

How good a fit Maxime Bernier will be in MacKay's job is anyone's guess.

O'Connor in revenue has to be embarrassing. He might not have been great, but he wasn't a bad defence minister.

On the positive side, more than any defence minister in our history, O'Connor has been sensitive to individual wrongs within the military that DND was not only reluctant to correct, but for years (even decades) adamantly refused to correct or even review.

It was O'Connor's personal involvement that got the military to settle with former Warrant Officer Matt Stopford who suffered blindness in one eye and crippling internal ailments from service in Croatia, where his own men were poisoning his coffee, but the brass never informed Stopford until seven years later.

Shameful.

Until O'Connor's intervention, DND was determined to stonewall Stopford's suit.

O'Connor also got justice for Cliff Wenzel, a Second World War bomber pilot with a Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Force Cross, who after 20 years in the RCAF was wrongly denied a reduced pension, and was rebuffed by the DND bureaucracy (arguably the most stubborn in government) for over 40 years.

O'Connor not only corrected that injustice with an apology and ex-gratia payment, but also ordered something similar for Flt.-Sgt. W. Waldo Coates of Halifax who was wrongly denied a pension in 1956 after 21 years of service. Although Coates had died long before O'Connor's settlement, his widow got the pension.

Not only that, five or six others who were cheated out of their legitimate pensions, stand to get re-paid.

Or, on reflection, stood to get repaid while O'Connor was defence minister. They may now be back to square one if MacKay doesn't have the same concern about righting previous wrongs.

Helping all these "victims" of the DND bureaucracy was retired Col. Michel Drapeau, today Canada's most experienced lawyer in Canadian military matters.

From his record and background, one would have thought veterans affairs would have been a more appropriate portfolio than revenue for O'Connor. But that's not to be.

As for the 11 cabinet changes, we will have to wait and see if these improve the public's perception of the Harper government, which hasn't moved much in the polls (despite Stephane Dion as Liberal leader) since the Tories won the last election.

So far, there seems little cause for celebration in the Tory ranks.

MacKay plays defence

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PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 20
BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 268

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PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
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EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 11
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 199

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Ministers on a mission Shuffled tag-team duo for foreign affairs and defence 'all about Afghanistan'

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DATE: 2007.08.16

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SECTION: News

PAGE: 8

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of PETER MACKAY Atlantic Canada 2. photo of MAXIME BERNIER Role in Quebec

BYLINE: ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU

WORD COUNT: 283

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Ministers on a mission Shuffled tag-team duo for foreign affairs and defence 'all about Afghanistan' 69

MackKay plays defence

SOURCETAG 0708160437
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 14
BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 268

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Duo gets Afghan mission Ministers to be tag-team

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 11
ILLUSTRATION: photo of MAXIME BERNIER Expected to sell
BYLINE: ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU
COLUMN: Parliament Hill
WORD COUNT: 282

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U.S. targets Taliban in Tora Bora region

SOURCETAG 0708160425

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.08.16

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: BAGRAMI, AFGHANISTAN

WORD COUNT: 199

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'AIMED AT TERRORIZING'

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Also yesterday, attackers shot and killed a British national in Kabul, the British Embassy said. Two Afghan men were arrested.

The suspects and victim were employees of a private security company, ArmorGroup.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

MacKay plays defence

SOURCETAG 0708160626
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: A9
BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
WORD COUNT: 268

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'All about Afghanistan' PM focused on military mission with shuffle: observers

SOURCETAG: 0708160957
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 33
ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. photo of MAXIME BERNIER Quebec pitch 2. photo of PETER MACKAY Atlantic voice
BYLINE: ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU
WORD COUNT: 314

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Suicides soar

SOURCETAG 0708160953
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 25
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 94

U.S. army soldiers committed suicide last year at the highest rate in 26 years and more than one-quarter did so while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, said a new military report.

The report found there were 99 confirmed suicides among active-duty soldiers during 2006, up from 88 the previous year and the highest since 102 suicides in 1991.

The suicides included 28 soldiers deployed to the two wars and 71 who weren't. The 99 suicides amounted to a rate of 17.3 out of 100,000 –the highest in the last 26 years, the report said. KEYWORDS=WORLD

U.S. targets Taliban in Tora Bora region

SOURCETAG 0708160944
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 12
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 199

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Little cause for Tory joy

SOURCETAG 0708160941
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 11
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON, TORONTO SUN
WORD COUNT: 471

Although Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cabinet shuffle is aimed more at reviving public confidence in his leadership than improving the country, an uneasy reality is that it's unlikely to do either.

That's a fact of cabinet shuffles, regardless of which party is in power. For the ministers shuffled, however, it's a chance to start over.

Incoming ministers to a portfolio are excused for a while from answering questions or knowing what's going on — and have instant amnesia about the portfolio from which they've been switched.

If that sounds cynical, well, it's the truth. And it's politics.

Most of the attention in this shift has been directed at defence, where Gordon O'Connor, a former regular force brigadier-general, was generally viewed as having stumbled, failing to articulate the message of Afghanistan (whatever it is), and was seen as being uncomfortable and distrustful of the media (that's a failing?).

That he's being replaced by Peter MacKay is hardly cause for joy. Maybe someday, but not yet. MacKay in Foreign Affairs was, in essence, a know-nothing. Not his background. What he knows about the military probably equals his knowledge of foreign matters when the Tories formed the government.

How good a fit Maxime Bernier will be in MacKay's job is anyone's guess.

O'Connor in Revenue has to be embarrassing. He might not have been great, but he wasn't a bad defence minister.

On the positive side, more than any defence minister in our history, O'Connor has been sensitive to individual wrongs within the military that DND was not only reluctant to correct, but for years (even decades) adamantly refused to correct or even review.

It was O'Connor's personal involvement that got the military to settle with former Warrant Officer Matt Stopford who suffered blindness in one eye and crippling internal ailments from service in Croatia, where his own men were poisoning his coffee, but the brass never informed Stopford until seven years later.

Shameful.

Until O'Connor's intervention, DND was determined to stonewall Stopford's suit.

O'Connor also got justice for Cliff Wenzel, a Second World War bomber pilot with a Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Force Cross, who after 20 years in the RCAF was wrongly denied a reduced pension, and was

rebuffed by the DND bureaucracy (arguably the most stubborn in government) for over 40 years.

O'Connor not only corrected that injustice with an apology and ex-gratia payment, but also ordered something similar for Flt.-Sgt. W. Waldo Coates of Halifax who was wrongly denied a pension in 1956 after 21 years of service. Although Coates had died long before O'Connor's settlement, his widow got the pension.

Not only that, five or six others who were cheated out of their legitimate pensions, stand to get repaid.

Or, on reflection, stood to get repaid while O'Connor was defence minister. They may now be back to square one if MacKay doesn't have the same concern about righting previous wrongs.

Helping all these "victims" of the DND bureaucracy was retired Col. Michel Drapeau, today Canada's most experienced lawyer in Canadian military matters.

From his record and background, one would have thought Veterans Affairs would have been a more appropriate portfolio than Revenue for O'Connor.

As for the 11 cabinet changes, we will have to wait and see if these improve the public's perception of the Harper government, which hasn't moved much in the polls (despite Stephane Dion as Liberal leader) since the Tories won the last election.

So far, there seems little cause for celebration in the Tory ranks.

MacKay plays defence

SOURCETAG 0708160938
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 10
BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 268

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'Kandahar Kids' to rule agenda MacKay and Bernier to focus on Afghanistan

SOURCETAG: 0708160841
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 28
BYLINE: ALAN FINDLAY, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 237

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SOURCETAG 0708160818
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 14
BYLINE: PAUL BERTON
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 268

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: BAGRAMI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 199

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Weeping for only some child soldiers; Omar Khadr was 15 when he was jailed. Why do we want him to rot there?

IDNUMBER 200708160049
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Comment
PAGE: A12
COLUMN: Dan Gardner
BYLINE: Dan Gardner
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 806

In 1993, Ishmael Beah was a boy — only 12 — when rebels came to his little village in Sierra Leone. Fleeing into the jungle with others his age, he wandered, starved and tried to make sense of this terrifying new world.

At 13, he joined what was nominally the national army. In reality, it was a heavily armed band of thugs who put rifles in the hands of children, got them stoned on drugs and sent them off to inflict terror.

Fingers and hands chopped off. Prisoners tortured. Children's skulls smashed. Whole villages massacred. The life of a child soldier in Sierra Leone's civil war was one of fear, hate, cruelty and madness.

After almost three years in this hell, when Beah was 15, the world finally showed him a little mercy. Fieldworkers with the United Nations pulled Beah from the army and sent him to a rehabilitation centre. The violent, disturbed teenager was counselled by a nurse with a saint's patience and love.

Beah proved to be a lively and intelligent boy. When his fragile new life in the capital was again smashed by the civil war, he fled to New York.

With the help of a dedicated foster mother, he attended the UN's international school and excelled. After that came Oberlin College and a degree in politics. Then his life took a turn so wonderful it sounds like the plot of a Ron Howard movie.

He wrote his memoirs, *A Long Way Gone*. They were published. And they were a massive success.

It's hard to imagine a more satisfying tale. We weep at the cruelties inflicted on an innocent boy. We weep again, but this time with joy, at his redemption. It is the sweetest justice.

And for that reason, I'm a bit puzzled at the hostility so many Canadians feel for Omar Khadr.

Omar Khadr was born in Toronto. He is a Canadian citizen. He is also an accused terrorist.

In July 2002, Khadr was captured in a fierce firefight in Afghanistan. It is alleged that at the end of this battle, Khadr threw a grenade that killed an American soldier. He has been imprisoned in Guantanamo ever since.

Weeping for only some child soldiers; Omar Khadr was 15 when he was jailed. Why do we want h87 to rot th

Khadr has never been tried or convicted of any crime, but the U.S. asserts the right to hold him indefinitely. This past weekend, the Canadian Bar Association called for Khadr to be returned to Canada to face due process here.

One more detail: At the time of his capture, Omar Khadr was 15 years old.

Does that matter? To many Canadians, it does not. Following the CBA's call for Khadr's repatriation, the most generous view I heard was that Khadr should be returned, tried and severely punished. The more common preference is for Khadr to be left to rot in Gitmo.

I find this puzzling. Khadr and Beah were both 15 years old when they ceased to bear arms. And while Khadr is accused of having killed one soldier in battle, Beah admits to having killed "too many people to count" — most of whom were civilians.

And yet we embrace and celebrate Ishmael Beah, while we so despise Omar Khadr that we want, at the minimum, to see him tried and punished.

Why? I'm not entirely sure, though I suspect part of the explanation lies in our feelings for Omar Khadr's family.

What an amazing band of cranks, fanatics and bigots the Khadrs are. They greedily lap up every privilege and benefit of Canadian citizenship while giving this country nothing but sneers and contempt. They deserve to be loathed.

But surely it is obvious that Omar Khadr cannot be blamed for words he did not speak and actions he did not choose. This absolves him of everything the Khadrs have done while he was imprisoned. And prior to that, he was a young boy whose choices in life were decided by his father, Ahmed Khadr, a violent religious nut whose control over the family was cult-like. A child born into such circumstances deserves pity and rescue.

It's often noted that on that day in July 2002, the 15-year-old could have surrendered but did not. When the Americans stood over him, he begged to be shot. And so a childhood spent in isolation with fanatics did what it was intended to do: Omar Khadr had been turned into a dangerous fanatic.

These facts are often cited as proof that Khadr is somehow different than other child soldiers, but there's nothing really unusual in this.

Kids who have been indoctrinated and hardened by experience are often loyal, fearless and unspeakably vicious. They are treated as victims, not criminals, for no other reason than they are children—who, by definition, do not fully understand and choose their actions and cannot be held responsible for them.

But at 15, was Omar Khadr a child? Those who want him punished say no. He knew what he was doing. He was a man.

Ordinarily, I'd respond by pointing out that international law says otherwise.

I might also mention that the same U.S. government imprisoning Khadr has often, in other contexts, referred to 15-year-old soldiers as children. It has even spent millions of dollars rehabilitating Afghan child soldiers who were, at the time of their demobilization, older than Khadr.

But I'll leave all that aside and simply ask anyone who wants Omar Khadr punished as an adult to read *A Long Way Gone*.

Weeping for only some child soldiers; Omar Khadr was 15 when he was jailed. Why do we want h88 to rot th

Weep for a 15-year-old killer. Thrill to his rescue. Cheer as he becomes the beautiful young man he is today.

And then, please, explain why we should feel so differently about that other child soldier.

Weeping for only some child soldiers; Omar Khadr was 15 when he was jailed. Why do we want him to rot th

U.S., Afghan forces mount offensive near border

IDNUMBER 200708160041
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 68

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. and Afghan forces have launched a major operation against al-Qaeda fighters based in mountains bordering Pakistan, the U.S. army said yesterday after a bomb killed three German police officers near Kabul.

The U.S. and Afghan offensive was in the Tora Bora mountains where al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was once thought to be hiding in a series of cave and tunnel complexes.

American military allies itself with bad guys

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PAGE: A11
BYLINE: Stephen Braun
SOURCE: Los Angeles Times
WORD COUNT: 1008

Following is the opinion of the writer, a national correspondent for the Los Angeles Times and co-author Merchant of Death: Money, Guns, Planes and the Man Who Makes War Possible.

The United States seems to be missing some guns in Iraq. Somehow, the U.S. military has lost track of 110,000 AK-47 assault rifles and 80,000 pistols that were supposedly delivered from our caches to Iraqi security forces.

It was classic bureaucratic bungling, the Government Accountability Office concluded last month in a report criticizing the Pentagon's failure to keep proper records and track weapons flows. But there may have been another factor — the government's dangerous and bumbling use of bad guys.

Consider the case of one particular bad guy, Viktor Bout — a stout, canny Russian air transporter who also happens to be the world's most notorious arms dealer. When the U.S. government needed to fly four planeloads of seized weapons from an American base in Bosnia to Iraqi security forces in Baghdad in August 2004, they used a Moldovan air cargo company tied to Bout's aviation empire. The planes apparently never arrived.

When Amnesty International investigators tried two years later to trace the shipment of more than 99 tons of AK-47s and other weapons, U.S. officials admitted they had no record of the flights landing in Baghdad.

The missing Bosnian weapons could simply be a paperwork problem, but Bout's involvement as the transporter raises bleak possibilities far beyond bureaucratic error — including the possibility that the arms were diverted to another country or to Iraqi insurgents killing American troops.

That's because Bout is about as bad as bad guys get. For more than a decade before he landed on U.S. payrolls, Bout's air cargo operations delivered tons of contraband weapons — ranging from rifles to helicopter gunships — to some of the world's most dangerous misfits. He stoked wars across Africa, supplying Charles Taylor, the deposed Liberian president now on trial for war crimes. He ferried \$50 million in guns and other cargo, and he even sold air freighters to the Taliban, whose mullahs shared their lethal inventories with al-Qaida's terrorists in Afghanistan.

Bout also has a well-known record for working both sides of the fence. His planes armed both the Angolan government in Africa and rebel forces arrayed against it. He cut weapons deals with Afghanistan's Northern Alliance government before betraying it by arming the Taliban.

By the late 1990s, much of this was known to U.S. intelligence, which had targeted him for an early form of rendition in the hopes of putting him out of business. But two years after the Sept. 11 attacks, Bout turned up

as a linchpin in the U.S. supply line to Iraq.

Air Force records obtained by the Los Angeles Times show that his planes flew hundreds of runs into the high-security zone at Baghdad International Airport, delivering everything from guns to drilling equipment to frozen food. The military officials who oversaw his flights knew nothing about the war-stoking background of the Bout network.

How did Bout go from being persona non grata to a valued U.S. contractor? Some European intelligence officials believe that Bout made a deal with the U.S., secretly using his talents to aid the invasion of Afghanistan and getting a payday as an Iraq contractor. But there is also evidence that U.S. officials simply dropped the ball when it came to checking contractor bona fides as they rushed to set up supply lines into Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003.

Bout's planes were used as what former deputy defence secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz described as "second-tier contractors." Prime contractors would be hired to fly in supplies and they would then hire Bout planes, either directly or through air charter services.

Although the companies had nominal responsibility to know the background of their hires, no one at the Pentagon seemed to share in that role. "It was 'do it now, the fewer questions asked the better,'" said Air Force National Guard Lieut. Col. Christopher Walker, who oversaw the air operations in Baghdad in 2004.

Once Bout's companies were hired, there also was no follow-up to learn more about their background and performance. By the fall of 2004, however, Bout had been targeted by a Treasury Department freeze in assets, prompted by a UN effort to use economic sanctions against Liberian dictator Taylor and his inner circle — which included Bout.

But weeding out Bout's contracts was not a pressing problem to the Defence Department — even after he had become an official enemy of the U.S. government. ("We're talking about tens of thousands of contracts," said one Army official.)

Worse, as late as 2005, after Bout's nefarious background and his role in Iraq were publicly exposed, military officials pressured Treasury Department officials to hold off on sanctions against his business empire until he had finished a final run of supply flights to Iraq.

Defence officials now say they have tightened up procedures, but other government veterans who dealt with the Pentagon on the Bout affair remain dubious. The Pentagon has provided few specifics about how it will scrutinize air transporters in the future. And without any congressional or public government inquiry into Bout's hiring, there is no pressure for it to do so.

One thing about the Bout affair is certain. As of mid-2006, his outfits were no longer flying for the U.S. in Iraq. But now he poses a new problem: "blowback," the blunt term espionage writers like to use for the deadly consequences of poor spycraft.

When the U.S. turned to the Bout network to mount its Iraq supply flights, it was already clear that Bout's network had aided the Taliban's extremist mullahs. How could the U.S. be absolutely certain he wouldn't fly for our enemies once he had left the payroll?

We couldn't and, apparently, he is.

Last summer, a jumbo Il-76 flying the Khazakh flag swooped down to a landing in Mogadishu, Somalia, to unload arms for radical Islamic leaders who briefly seized control of that country. It was one of Bout's planes, concluded U.S. military intelligence officials.

Another bullet-point in a bad guy's resume.

India, Pakistan still face challenges

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COLUMN: Jonathon Manthorpe
BYLINE: Jonathon Manthorpe
SOURCE: Vancouver Sun
WORD COUNT: 735

One of the grander myths of modern Asia is that 60 years after independence and partition India is a huge success and Pakistan is an abject failure.

In terms of how ordinary people live their daily lives in both countries, this just is not true.

The United Nations Human Development index, which gathers and compares a basket of economic and quality-of-life indicators, ranks India as the 126th out of 177 countries and Pakistan 134th.

Neither is there much to choose between the two countries in other indicators. Average life expectancy in Pakistan is 63.4 years while it's 63.6 years in India.

Per capita domestic product — sometimes expressed as average annual income — is \$3,139 US in India and \$2,225 in Pakistan.

But India, with 1.1-billion people, has the world's largest population living in poverty. An Indian state-run agency said last week that 77 per cent of the country's people live on about 25 cents US a day, well below the UN's poverty level of \$1 US a day. Indian children are, on average, more malnourished than children in Africa.

Since economic reform was begun in 1991 by the then finance minister, now the prime minister, Manmohan Singh, the Indian economy has blossomed. Annual economic growth in India is about nine per cent but Pakistan is not far behind that.

Yet it is self-evident that as both countries celebrate this week their independence from Britain that an aura of optimism, dynamism and progress hangs over India while Pakistan seems never to have achieved lift-off.

India glories in being the world's largest democracy and a multicultural secular state that reveres, though does not always achieve, the British imperial gifts of political, administrative and judicial competence.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is under the military rule of President Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in 1999. Indeed, Pakistan has had military rulers for more than half the time since independence and what democratically elected governments there have been have always appeared unstable and subject to the whim of the military.

Not that even Musharraf seems secure in power. The ungoverned and ungovernable mountainous western reaches of the country have become a haven for Taliban and al-Qaida fighters operating in neighbouring

Afghanistan.

This has brought pressure from the United States, with whom Musharraf has allied himself. But that very alliance has made him a target of Islamic radicals both in the wild border region, and also in the heart of his capital Islamabad.

Meanwhile the political parties and the judiciary are pressing for a return to democracy and civilian rule.

At the time of partition and independence Pakistan and India faced choices about their styles of nationhood and politics. India, despite its massive and sometimes radical Hindu majority, chose to be a secular democracy.

This path was firmly laid out by the first leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, who in his 17 years as prime minister instilled the culture of democracy.

His victory was that when he died the political succession passed without a hitch and though he spawned a political dynasty through his daughter Indira Gandhi and grandson Rajiv Gandhi, that appears to have been swept away by the gusts of economic reform.

Pakistan's founding father Mohammed Ali Jinnah, on the other hand, created a country that defined itself by the Muslim religion of its people.

Jinnah said he wanted Pakistan to be a Muslim democracy, but religion always seemed to trump democracy and the country's semi-feudal ruling classes continue to outvote the will of the people. When, for example, the secular Congress Party won elections in North West Frontier Province, he dismissed the government and installed a Muslim League administration.

He was equally cavalier with what was then called East Pakistan, that predominantly Muslim province on the far side of India that in 1971 successfully rebelled against Pakistani rule and is now Bangladesh. One of Bangladesh's many unhappinesses was when Jinnah ordered the territory's Bengali speaking people to use Urdu, the language of Pakistan.

The intense rivalry between India and Pakistan stems from the moment of birth of both countries.

Partition set off one of the greatest migrations in human history as 13 million people sought homes across the new border. At the same time there was a horrific bloodletting when up to a million people were killed in religious vendettas.

Passions have not cooled over the years and Pakistan and India have fought three wars, most theoretically over the disputed territory of Kashmir, though in reality over more visceral antagonisms.

The latest fighting in 1999 came close to blossoming into something much worse. Both countries have acquired nuclear weapons in recent years.

The prospect of nuclear war has forced Islamabad and New Delhi to recognize relations must be improved and both have taken firm steps in that direction, but mutual suspicion remains very much alive for the moment.

What is the Revolutionary Guard?

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PAGE:	A16
ILLUSTRATION:	Colour Photo: DAMIR SAGOLJ, REUTERS / Iranian Revolutionary Guards pray at the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in February 2004. The group was founded in 1979, during the Islamic Revolution. ;
SOURCE:	New York Times; Reuters; AFP
WORD COUNT:	161

Iran's Revolutionary Guard, or Pasdaran, is an elite military force that operates outside the regular army.

It dates to the Islamic revolution of 1979 and its branches are believed to extend widely throughout the Iranian military. An estimate by GlobalSecurity.org, a research group based in Alexandria, Va., puts the total guard forces at 125,000. Others say it could be as high as 350,000 soldiers.

Under the Ahmadinejad administration, U.S. officials said, the guard has moved increasingly into commercial operations, earning profits and extending its influence in Iran in areas involving big government contracts, including building airports and other infrastructure, oil production and providing cell phones.

Washington has claimed the Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force wing is responsible for the growing flow of explosives, roadside bombs, rockets and other arms to Shiite militias in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Quds Force has also been blamed for supporting Shiite allies such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and to such Sunni movements as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

U.S. seeks to isolate Iran further; Likely to name force terrorists. Move against Revolutionary Guard reported to be aimed at appeasing hawks like Cheney

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DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BYLINE: SHELDON ALBERTS

SOURCE: CanWest News Service; Reuters and AFP contributed to thisreport

WORD COUNT: 734

A U.S. decision to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a foreign terrorist organization fuelled speculation yesterday the White House is laying the groundwork for air strikes against the hard-line Islamic country before U.S. President George W. Bush leaves office.

Foreign policy analysts were surprised by the reported White House decision, which would mark the first time in history that the United States has formally declared the armed forces of a sovereign nation to be terrorists.

"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. air force colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge. Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state," Gardiner said.

In Crawford, Tex., a White House spokesperson, Dana Perino, said it would be inappropriate to comment on any possible actions the United States is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard.

But several high-ranking U.S. officials, in strategic leaks to media outlets, said Bush has already made a decision to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group that threatens U.S. security and economic interests.

The administration could formally announce the move as early as next month, before United Nations Security Council meetings in New York, when the United States will seek tougher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

The expected designation of the Revolutionary Guard would allow the United States to freeze any financial assets the force has with U.S. companies, but a larger goal is to ramp up pressure on international firms to cut ties with Iran.

Iran experts and diplomats said the squeeze on financing for the Guards was aimed at pacifying hard-liners within and outside the Bush administration who want military action against Tehran and are frustrated that

U.S. seeks to isolate Iran further; Likely to name force terrorists. Move against Revolutionary Guard reported

diplomatic pressure has not worked either on curbing the nuclear program or over Iraq.

"Firstly, it is going to limit the movements of the Revolutionary Guard leaders and personnel to neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq and secondly it is going to have a major impact on its economic activities," said Rasool Nafisi, a Middle East analyst and professor with Strayer University of Virginia.

"Remember, the IRGC is a large economic entity with many, many subsidiaries and companies and the U.S. move is going to limit their trade with the outside the world," Nafisi said.

"Many of the front companies engaged in procuring nuclear technology are owned and run by the Revolutionary Guards," Ray Takeyh of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations told Washington Post.

The plan is reported to be the brainchild of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and is thought to be aimed at showing Bush administration hawks – particularly Vice-President Dick Cheney – that the State Department is ready to take a more unilateral, confrontational approach with Iran if diplomacy fails.

A formal designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as terrorists could also provide Bush political cover should he decide on future military strikes inside Iran, allowing the White House to contend attacks were approved under the post-9/11 congressional authorization for war against terrorist groups.

"If the U.S. had decided on the Cheney option, this is what we would do as a way of preparing for it," Gardiner said. "The new Cheney option includes air strikes against terrorist training camps inside Iran."

Officials in Tehran initially scoffed at news of the Washington's plan.

"Such a report is in the framework of the propaganda and psychological activity of the American administration against the Islamic Republic of Iran," a senior Iranian official said told the country's official news agency.

Some analysts said the U.S. move to escalate tensions with Iran could make it more difficult to reach a negotiated agreement on disputes over nuclear energy and Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Rather than cowing Iran into backing down, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is just as likely to respond by stepping up its anti-U.S. activities in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, Gardiner said.

"The problem is that (the White House) misunderstands the Iranians. The Iranians understand we are serious but are not going to be pushed around."

As news of the new U.S. tactic emerged, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced his force's missiles are now capable of striking targets throughout the Persian Gulf. Yahya Rahim Safavi, the commander-in-chief, warned that no rival warships could pass through the region's waters without risk of being struck by Iranian weapons.

Harper the giant-killer ends a proud era

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PAGE: A15
COLUMN: James Travers
DATELINE: Ottawa
BYLINE: James Travers
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 560

There was a time when the russet, sphinxlike building known here as Fort Pearson — home to the Department of Foreign Affairs — was home to giants. Men and, yes, women towered over their peers and revelled in the world's nuanced complexity. They considered the office overlooking the Ottawa and Rideau rivers a privilege as well as a reward.

It's tempting to say that era ended this week with the promotion of Maxime Bernier to head the department. After all, at just 44 and with less than two years' political experience, Bernier is a curious choice for a portfolio that historically ranks just below that of prime minister.

But Stephen Harper's senior Quebec minister isn't a break with tradition, he's part of an emerging continuum. The proof is his predecessor.

Peter MacKay was not in any meaningful sense Canada's foreign minister. Relegated to the supporting cast, he was dominated by yet another prime minister who seized and held the significant international files.

As it turns out, that was a good thing. Even as an understudy, MacKay's performance was problematic. Gob-smacked by Condoleezza Rice and geographically challenged, the man Harper pushed onto the global stage too often displayed inexperience. He urged Pakistan to build a Taliban-controlling fence along its rugged border, Russians to return to Afghanistan and wrongly claimed Canadian sovereignty over the North Pole.

Nobody's perfect and successful politicians learn. So it's fervently hoped that what foreign affairs taught MacKay will make him more knowledgeable at defence. Still, it's a long spiral down from Lester B. Pearson to MacKay and now Bernier.

Beyond peacekeeping and the Nobel Prize, Pearson as bureaucrat and minister personified the utility of a creative, modest power. Foreign affairs is so soaked in that culture, so conscious of its attraction to the brightest, that eyebrows arched in 2002 when Jean Chretien chose Bill Graham for the portfolio.

Those concerns now seem ludicrous. Eloquent in French as well as English, Graham taught international law and chaired Parliament's foreign affairs committee before becoming minister.

Bernier struggles in English, has an economic background and was first elected last year. The argument is that none of that matters much. Harper will handle vital U.S. relations and his acolyte will be as carefully controlled as cabinet colleagues.

Still, there's more to the decline and fall of a once proud department and the now acceptable ordinariness of its ministers. In keeping with his disdain for diplomats and their tiny shrimp canapes, this prime minister sees the military as a more effective instrument to project a foreign policy that's increasingly shaped by domestic politics.

That, of course, is where Bernier fits. His mandate as Harper's senior francophone is to sell Conservatives to Quebecers. That means marketing an unpopular Afghanistan mission and coping with expectations that this government will treat the province as more of an equal internationally.

Bernier is better suited to those roles than restoring either prestige to Fort Pearson or coherence to Canadian actions offshore. Suave, even a bit of a dandy, he leaves industry with a reputation as ideologically rigid, not particularly well-read and ultimately less than meets the eye.

That's not what's needed at foreign affairs. A strong minister with a broad perspective is required to lead a department struggling to demonstrate that its expertise and network connections are priceless assets in world where almost every issue is global.

Instead, the pattern repeats and the giants galumph into memory.

James Travers writes on national affairs.

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THE AFGHAN MISSION British losing faith as casualty rate climbs

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BYLINE: BRETT POPPLEWELL

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: SPCL

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: London ENGLAND

WORDS: 623

WORD COUNT: 598

BRETT POPPLEWELL Special to The Globe and Mail LONDON The British government is under attack over the war in Afghanistan as the rising troop toll is drawing the kind of negative attention previously given to the deeply unpopular efforts in Iraq.

Reports from Afghanistan – such as the ones detailing 12 soldiers' deaths in the past month – have raised questions about whether Britain's involvement is any more justified than its war effort in Iraq.

The government, however, is having none of it. "We can overmatch [the Taliban] . . . we can face them down and we can drive them out of communities," Defence Secretary Des Browne said yesterday.

Earlier this week, war–death statistics published in a number of British papers indicated that front–line troops in Afghanistan's Helmand province were being killed at a rate of one in every 36 – compared with one in every 46 for U.S. servicemen in the Vietnam War.

The Daily Telegraph produced an even grimmer revelation yesterday: The overall casualty rate among front–line units in Afghanistan is higher than the casualties averaged by Commonwealth troops in the Second World War.

Britain has about 6,000 troops in Afghanistan, 500 more than it does in Iraq.

The largest group of British troops in Afghanistan are training Afghan security forces, helping with reconstruction and providing security, while also combatting the country's growing opium trade.

Of its total forces in Afghanistan, only 1,500 are classified as front–line troops. It's these troops that have been taking a heavy pounding from Taliban insurgents in Helmand, which neighbours Kandahar province where Canadian forces took heavy casualties last year.

The hardest hit have been the Royal Anglians Regiment, which has lost a fifth of its troops to battle wounds, injuries and disease as 131 soldiers out of a 650–strong force have fallen out of combat duty.

These losses are comparable with those suffered by Commonwealth troops during the Second World War, when 11 per cent of the 11 million troops mobilized were either killed, wounded or declared missing in action.

These recent revelations, though based on math that is not entirely scientific as the past few weeks have seen a higher death rate in Afghanistan than previous weeks and the comparison is between front-line troops in Afghanistan, and all Second World War troops, have cast a shadow over a war effort that many Britons seem no longer to support.

On Monday, opposition parties called on the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to urgently review his policy in Afghanistan.

"These statistics are deeply saddening, above all, because they represent personal tragedies for hundreds of British families. But they are also an indictment of a government which has no clear idea how to get British Forces home without further heavy loss of life," Sir Menzies Campbell, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, said.

But it doesn't look as though troops will be coming home any time soon. Brigadier John Lorimer, Britain's top soldier in Helmand, predicted yesterday that British troops would be in Afghanistan for as long as they were in Northern Ireland – 38 years.

A YouGov poll published this weekend found only 6 per cent of voters felt Britain was winning in Afghanistan while 15 per cent felt British troops were making Basra a safer place for its residents.

However, 74 per cent of those polled said they wanted the troops brought home from Iraq immediately or within the next year while 65 per cent said the same thing for Afghanistan.

At the heart of the debate in Parliament is the government's recent decision to disband three British battalions, a move critics say has increased the burden of the remaining battalions, which have to serve longer and more frequent rotations in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Great Britain; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: foreign policy; defence; war deaths; statistics; public opinion polls

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

Give O'Connor credit where credit is due

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BYLINE: J.L. GRANATSTEIN

SECTION: Comment

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 829

WORD COUNT: 766

J.L. GRANATSTEIN Writes on behalf of the Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century General media satisfaction greeted the demotion of Gordon O'Connor from Minister of National Defence to Revenue Minister on Tuesday.

Mr. O'Connor once again was labelled a former lobbyist and lacklustre communicator, and The Globe and Mail noted acerbically that he "so mishandled the controversy surrounding Canada's treatment of Afghan detainees" that the Prime Minister grew reluctant to let him answer questions in the House of Commons.

An almost total failure, in other words.

This is grossly unfair, a complete concentration on form over substance. In Mr. O'Connor's year and a half in the Defence portfolio, the Canadian Forces received almost unprecedented funding for equipment purchases, more than \$20-billion in all.

Yes, the PM wanted to rebuild the military. Yes, the chiefs of the air and naval staffs and the army's head, along with the Chief of the Defence Staff, all had officers producing documents and memorandums to bolster the case.

But ultimately, it was the defence minister, Gordon O'Connor, who had the job of persuading cabinet committees, the Finance Minister, and the Clerk of the Privy Council, the government's key players, that the purchases were necessary. Immediate post-shuffle assessments of Mr. O'Connor's tenure did not make this point. We all know that if the former brigadier-general had failed to secure funding for new equipment, he would have been blasted by the media for his deficiencies.

But he did get the money – the first C-17 transport has already reached Canada – and the successes must properly be credited to him.

Then there is Afghanistan. No one will argue that Mr. O'Connor did not mess up the Afghan detainees' file. He seemed ill-briefed on occasion, and his ready ability to keep his foot firmly in his mouth did him no good. But on the issue of fighting the war in Kandahar, the truly important matter, Gordon O'Connor was sound as a bell.

The Canadian contingent in Afghanistan, the House of Commons defence committee said a few months ago, is the "most combat effective, best trained, best led, best equipped, best supported mission of its kind that Canada has ever deployed." That is simply true, a judgment offered by a committee in which the opposition parties hold a majority. It is also one confirmed by commanders and soldiers alike.

Who gets the credit for this? Mr. O'Connor must receive it. When better artillery was required, new guns were acquired. When anti-mine vehicles proved necessary, the minister made sure they went to Kandahar.

Tanks? Radar to track mortar shells? Unmanned Aerial Vehicles? Same thing. The only shortfall was in Chinook helicopters to move personnel and supplies (the Mulroney government sold Canada's Chinooks to the Dutch, who use them in Afghanistan) – they are on order. This is a far cry from Canada's first troop deployment to Afghanistan in 2002, when soldiers arrived with unprotected Ilitis Jeeps and the wrong camouflage uniforms and boots.

Then there is the "Canada First" defence plan, the emphasis on sovereignty in the Arctic that clearly resonates with the public.

We don't want to lose the North, and new naval vessels, an Arctic deepwater port, an army cold-weather training base, and an improved, expanded Ranger force – all those formed part of the O'Connor plan.

If the Arctic and its riches stay Canadian, these measures will deserve some of the credit.

Finally, there were Mr. O'Connor's difficulties with Rick Hillier, the Chief of the Defence Staff. Gen. Hillier is not a soldier like the others, not one of the grey faceless bean-counters who rule at Fort Fumble on the Rideau. He is a superb communicator, a charismatic commander who can speak to young soldiers, old vets, and business leaders, and charm the birds out of the trees.

He and Mr. O'Connor sometimes disagreed on policy, or so it appeared.

My own suspicion is that, while the two did not get along well, the difficulties were sparked more by Mr. O'Connor's inability to communicate. Mr. O'Connor readily found himself painted by the media as a military retread, a clone of Gen. George Pearkes, John Diefenbaker's first defence minister, preparing to go over the top, while Gen.

Hillier, preaching Canadian Forces transformation, seemed the very model of a modern Chief of the Defence Staff.

In his brief, anodyne press conference after the swearing-in ceremony, Mr. Harper talked about the months since January of 2006 as a "historic period" for the Canadian Forces. The PM was right, and for all Mr.

O'Connor's flaws, the minister who directed the Department of National Defence deserves the lion's share of the credit. After all, someone who was so regularly denounced by the likes of Dawn Black and Denis Coderre, the NDP and Liberal defence critics, can't be all bad.

Gordon O'Connor wasn't, and he handled the important matters well.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: government; political; defence; policy

PERSONAL NAME: Gordon O'Connor

OUR MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN MacKay's tough sell

He will try to change the narrative, but you can't change the hard truths

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WENTE
SECTION: Comment Column
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE:
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MARGARET WENTE Don't envy Peter MacKay, the guy who got the big Defence job when Gordon O'Connor was felled by foot-in-mouth disease. It's a minefield.

He's got to keep pitching our mission in Afghanistan to a wary public, while dodging the IEDs lobbed by diligent journalists and the Opposition.

His superficial problem is simple. The headlines are always bad.

Soldiers die. The government allegedly screws things up (as with Afghan detainees dispatched to Afghan jails, when it didn't seem to know what was going on.) The residual impression in the public mind is that Afghanistan is just a pile of bad news. Mr. MacKay has to try to change the narrative.

His deeper problem is that there's not much good news on the ground.

As Chris Alexander, Canada's former ambassador to Afghanistan, puts it diplomatically, "The trend is not monolithically positive." But don't expect to hear the hard truths from either Mr. MacKay or his boss. Instead, expect to hear a lot of stuff about resolve, the long term, and doing the right thing.

Mr. Alexander, who's still serving in Afghanistan as a special envoy for the UN, figures in a recent New Yorker article by Jon Lee Anderson, called The Taliban's Opium War. It is an unsettling, worm's-eye-view account of just one of the contradictions and controversies that plague the NATO mission.

The NATO nations are divided over what to do about the poppy trade, which, apart from carpets, is Afghanistan's sole export. This year's bumper crop – a record – will supply no less than 95 per cent of the world's heroin. The Taliban, which banned opium when in power, now feed on opium money. The Americans and the Afghan government want to destroy the poppies. The Europeans argue that whacking down the poppy fields of impoverished farmers does not win hearts and minds, to say the least. Even the Americans are divided over a counternarcotics strategy, which, in any event, is certain to be sabotaged by warlords and corrupt officials, and dwarfed by the colossal value of the crop.

There's no good answer to the opium problem. Some people have proposed buying up the crop and converting it to medicinal purposes, but that's a pipe dream, if you'll excuse the expression. Meantime, writes Mr. Anderson, "the debilitating and corrupting effect of the opium trade on the government of President Hamid Karzai is a significant factor in the Taliban's revival." The opium trade is symptomatic of an even bigger problem. The NATO allies can't agree on how to fight the war. Canada's debate over fighting versus nation-building simply reflects the disagreement among the NATO countries. There are 37 NATO nations in Afghanistan, and each one has a different mandate from the folks back home. Different countries are in charge of different operations, and nobody is really in charge of the whole command. While the Canadians have been fighting hard in Kandahar, the Dutch have been hunkered down in Uruzgan launching women's sewing groups. Meantime, the Americans, who account for half the NATO troops, have been wiping out innocent bystanders on a regular basis.

And yet, without more boots on the ground, NATO doesn't stand much of a chance. In the view of retired Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, the alliance needs to send in at least another 10,000 combat troops if it wants to win the war. Since member countries have more than two million troops to draw on, theoretically this should not be hard. But it turns out we're not the only nation that's reluctant to pay its dues.

The real debate we should be having here in Canada is not whether our troops ought to be fighting the Taliban, or training the Afghan army instead. The real question is what, if anything, we can realistically accomplish within the context of such a fickle and divided effort.

If the West is really set on progress in Afghanistan, it will have to commit far more resources than it has. As one highly placed American official puts it, everything to date amounts to "duct tape." But the American public is exhausted from Iraq, and its military is tapped out. Other nations have zero taste for bigger contributions.

So where will those resources come from? No one knows. Some wishful thinkers want Stephen Harper to call an emergency session of NATO to discuss this, as if Canada's superior powers of moral suasion will somehow make a difference.

Fortunately for the government, the problem of Afghanistan will soon go away. Our present commitment lasts only until February, 2009, after which, Mr. Harper promises, a parliamentary consensus will rule the day. If the consensus is to get out of the line of fire – as it almost certainly will be – he's off the hook. Canada can leave the field with honour, having paid our NATO bill, hopefully without too many more casualties. If others don't step in, well, we've done our bit and then some. Better still, Mr. Harper can go to the polls and say he's listened to Canadians.

In it for the long term? Don't believe it. In politics, the long term is about as long as an election cycle. And in the long term, my bet is that Mr. Harper can read the electorate as well as Jean Chretien.

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ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: foreign policy; defence; strife; political

PERSONAL NAME: Peter MacKay

ORGANIZATION NAME: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OUR MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN MacKay's tough sell He will try to change the narrative, but you can't cha

Facts & Arguments: THE ESSAY Waving at death from an overpass Watching the procession escorting fallen Canadian soldiers is hauntingly surreal and, in some way, addictive

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072280176

DATE: 2007.08.16

PAGE: L8 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ROD MCDONALD

SECTION: Globe Life

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 803

WORD COUNT: 733

ROD McDONALD If you venture to the overpass once, you will keep going back.

It is an unwritten law.

The honking transport rigs, the flashing headlights of the cars as they whiz past under you, the waving hands of people looking up from behind their bug-splattered windshields: It all becomes haunting, surreal and, in some small way, addictive.

And in some small way, the crew on the overpass has become an unlikely fraternity. There are wide-eyed kids waving miniature Canadian flags.

Their parents tug on much larger ones that are draped over the cement railing, the material flapping proudly in the wind and exhaust fumes billowing up from the busiest highway in Canada.

"Are they coming yet, Daddy?" asks a little girl in pigtails tied with red ribbons and maple leaves, as she squints to see farther down the grim black ribbon of asphalt that people around here simply call The 401.

"Not yet, honey. Keep waving." There are handicapped people straining to get a view from their wheelchairs, and grim-faced seniors gripping their walkers as though they might take off without their masters.

Just behind me stands a fire truck and a knot of firefighters dressed in their street blues. One holds a CB radio that crackles out messages on the progress of the sombre military cortege that is headed our way from somewhere off in the east.

"They're just going through Grafton now, over." "That's about 10 minutes," says the firefighter.

It is June 24, 2007, and there will be three hearses this time around. Usually there is only one. Perhaps it will not look so lonely this time, I think. Once, the procession was so long that people could not see the end of it as it snaked its way down from the Northumberland Hills and onto the flats that run through Cobourg.

Northumberland County, which lies just to the east of the Greater Toronto Area, has established a tradition. Every time a mortally wounded Canadian soldier is flown home to Canada from Afghanistan, people line the overpasses of Highway 401 as a tribute to the soldier and his family.

After a repatriation ceremony at CFB Trenton, the hearse carrying the deceased soldier and limousines carrying the family, along with a police escort at the front to clear the right lane and another at the rear to cut off traffic, drive west to Toronto. As they cut through Northumberland County, they know what to expect as they drive into the sun: lots of Canadian flags and hundreds of thankful people.

In the beginning, there were three or four onlookers at the Ontario Street overpass in Cobourg. Tonight, there are more than 100. Off to the east, I can see the lights of a fire truck flashing on the Nagle Road overpass, and I can see lights and flags on the overpass behind me to the west.

Word passes that someone in a car with a Quebec licence plate has waved a Quebec flag and given us the finger. I chalk it up to St. Jean Baptiste Day celebrations and some extremist who probably got upset at the waving Canadian flags on his way to Toronto, not knowing that it had nothing to do with him and everything to do with three soldiers.

Before I know it, the three hearses have come and gone, and as I turn to watch the cortege heading down the highway, I hope that they will be welcomed all the way into the heart of the city.

But that is probably idealistic. Just like this vast country, Highway 401 is home to all kinds of people. And not all of them are as proud of our soldiers as the folks in this hilly county north of Lake Ontario.

It is July 8, 2007: There are six hearses this time. There are so many people that some of the kids decide to watch from the other side of the overpass to get a good view. There are two fire trucks, and six veterans from the Royal Canadian Legion gingerly carrying large Canadian flags as they make their way toward the middle of the overpass, high atop the ladder truck.

The flashing lights of the police escort seem to drop from the hills; a transport truck rolling beside the cortege veers unsteadily off the highway, out of respect.

As the hearses approach, a lady turns to me and says: "Sir. Would you please remove your cap?" I'm stunned.

But even though she scrambled my prayers, I know she is right.

Before I have time to remove my cap, the procession is disappearing in the west, and those who are not crying are clapping gently for something they will never fully comprehend.

Rod McDonald lives in Cobourg, Ont. submissions: facts@globeandmail.com

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: war deaths

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

U.S. preparing for air strikes against Iran? Revolutionary Guard designated as foreign terrorist organization

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.08.16

PAGE: A8

SECTION: World Wire

WORD COUNT: 650

CNS Sheldon Alberts WASHINGTON -- A U.S. decision to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a foreign terrorist organization fuelled speculation Wednesday the White House is laying the groundwork for air strikes against the hardline Islamic nation before President George W. Bush leaves office.

Foreign policy analysts were surprised Wednesday by the reported White House decision, which would mark the first time in history that the U.S. has formally declared the armed forces of a sovereign nation to be terrorists.

"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. air force colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge. Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state." In Crawford, Texas, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any possible actions" the U.S. is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard, an elite military force that operates outside Iran's regular army.

But several high-ranking U.S. officials, in strategic leaks to media outlets, said Bush has already made a decision to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group which threatens American security and economic interests.

The administration could formally announce the move as early as next month ahead of United Nations Security Council meetings in New York, when the U.S. will seek tougher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

The U.S. military has also repeatedly accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard, particularly its covert al-Quds Force, of supplying weapons to aid Shi'ite insurgents fighting American troops in Iraq.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard "is well-known to be engaged in" terrorist activities and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

"We are confronting Iran's behaviour in arming and providing material support to those groups that are going after our troops," McCormack.

The Revolutionary Guard operates its own naval, land and air forces independently from the Iran's regular armed forces, but has expanded its domestic operations recently to include commercial ventures ranging from oil production to infrastructure projects.

The expected designation of the Revolutionary Guard would allow the U.S. to freeze any financial assets the force has with U.S.

companies, but a larger goal is to ramp up pressure on international firms to cut ties with Iran.

The plan is reportedly the brainchild of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and is thought to be aimed at showing Bush administration hawks -- particularly Vice-President Dick Cheney -- that the State Department is ready to take a more unilateral, confrontational approach with Iran if diplomacy fails.

A formal designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as terrorists could also provide Bush political cover should he decide on future military strikes inside Iran, allowing the White House to contend attacks were approved under the post-9/11 congressional authorization for war against terror groups.

"If the U.S. had decided on the Cheney option, this is what we would do as a way of preparing for it," Gardiner said in an interview.

"The new Cheney option includes air strikes against terrorist training camps inside Iran." Officials in Tehran initially scoffed at news of the Washington's plan.

"Such a report is in the framework of the propaganda and psychological activity of the American administration against the Islamic Republic of Iran," a senior Iranian official said told IRNA, the country's official news agency.

Some analysts said the U.S. move to escalate tensions with Iran could backfire, making it more difficult to reach a negotiated agreement on disputes over nuclear energy and Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Rather than cowing Iran into backing down, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is just as likely to respond by stepping up its anti-U.S. activities in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, Gardiner believes.

"There are some within the (Bush) administration who believe the only reason the Iranians are not behaving is that they don't believe we are serious," he said.

-- CanWest News Service

THE MILITARY Department of Defence muzzles civilian MDs Publication of article describing soldier's death in Afghanistan prompts DND to warn physicians not to release sensitive information

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IDN: 072280122

DATE: 2007.08.16

PAGE: A4 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALAN FREEMAN

SECTION: National News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 441

WORD COUNT: 488

ALAN FREEMAN OTTAWA Stung by the publication of a magazine article by one of its doctors that includes the graphic description of the death of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan, the Department of National Defence has changed its contracts with civilian physicians, warning them not to release sensitive information and to respect patient confidentiality.

The changes to contract wording were ordered on July 30, coinciding with the appearance in Mother Jones, a U.S. magazine, of a memoir by Kevin Patterson, a B.C. physician, describing the month he spent working on contract to DND at a coalition military hospital in Kandahar.

The article includes several passages describing, in excruciating detail, the death on the operating table of Nova Scotia Corporal Kevin Megeney. Family members and friends have objected to the portrayal as a breach of the doctor's responsibility to keep patient dealings confidential. The department has launched two inquiries into the incident.

Lieutenant-Commander Pierre Babinsky, a DND spokesman on justice issues, insisted the new contract wording was not changed because of the Mother Jones controversy, but conceded they could be seen as linked. "This is not directly in response to the article, but it does cover some of the issues that raised concern from the article," he said.

The new contract wording deals with the need for confidentiality, not just in the case of patients but for operational security reasons as well. A fellow Canadian doctor said he was surprised by the detailed description of the Kandahar base included in the Mother Jones account.

According to the new contract wording, "It is critical to the safety of personnel, as well as the potential success of an operation, that sensitive information not be discussed or released outside the Department/Canadian Forces." The document goes on to say that "every contractor with access to any information dealing with personnel, equipment or operations has the potential to intentionally or unintentionally provide information that may result in compromise of an operation and/or increase the risk to our people.

"Therefore, it is requested that all contractors refrain from discussing or writing about their deployments except with those personnel who have a need to know." On the issue of patient confidentiality, the new contract language reminds doctors that they must follow the Privacy Act and rules set by provincial medical licensing authorities, noting that "personal health information will not be disclosed without the consent of the individual to whom it relates or their next of kin, as the case may be." DND has been hiring civilian doctors to augment its own full-time physicians because of a shortage of personnel, especially doctors experienced in trauma treatment.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: defence contracts; medical profession; safety; privacy

PERSONAL NAME: Kevin Patterson; Kevin Megeney

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

CULTURE: JOSEE VERNER A low profile despite years of political experience

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072280032

DATE: 2007.08.16

PAGE: R1 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: VAL ROSS

SECTION: The Globe Review

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 829

WORD COUNT: 847

VAL ROSS Josee Verner, Canada's newest Heritage minister, is an attractive, bilingual political veteran. Yet remarkably, over her years in the provincial Liberal party, Action Democratique du Quebec and now the Conservatives, she has accumulated little baggage – or profile.

Chair of the Tories' Quebec caucus, she represents the Quebec City riding of Louis–St–Laurent. All this makes her the right person to carry the federal flag when Quebec celebrates its 400th anniversary in 2008.

Samuel de Champlain arrived at 11 o'clock on July 3, 1608, and celebrations to mark that event in Quebec City already include \$90–million worth of circuses, concerts, sound and light shows, and official visits. There's even the possibility of a Papal visit – so clearly, the 400th is a big deal.

"We don't know Mme. Verner very well," commented Andree Gendreau, director of collections at the Musee de la civilization in Quebec City, and chairwoman of the Canadian Museums Association, "but we feel that the Prime Minister wanted to put someone into Heritage who would understand the importance of the 400th, to Quebec, to Canada, to America." Liberal heritage critic Tina Keeper was more cynical: "Thinking about Quebec is this government's only way to deal with this file." Still, hopes are high for Verner, who replaces Bev Oda in the portfolio, if only because Oda was seen as neither effective nor communicative. "Our colleagues in the francophone cultural community found Mme. Verner congenial, open–minded and accessible," said Alain Pineau, executive director of the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

In her Heritage job, "we give her the benefit of the doubt," he said, "if for no other reason than because she's from Quebec, where issues of culture and heritage are valued." Indeed, asked in a press scrum what the cabinet shuffle did for Quebec specifically, Harper responded, in French, "Arts and culture are truly important to Quebec and now Mme. Verner, a Quebecoise, has these responsibilities." In her previous role as Minister for International Co–operation, one of Verner's responsibilities was for la Francophonie, the international club of French–speaking countries and regions. Though she made no blunders, few can recall what she accomplished.

"I can't think of anything," said Clive Doucet, an Acadian poet and Ottawa city councillor. "Mr. Harper tends to pick media–savvy ministers who are good soldiers. In almost all cases, it's Mr. Harper who calls the shots." Yet despite Verner's low profile, the married mother of three is no stranger to controversy. One involves her husband's company, LXB Communication–Marketing – an ad and consulting agency mainly serving pharmaceutical giants. In June, Paul Bleau, a minority shareholder and former LXB employee, launched a lawsuit alleging, among other things, that between 1993 and 2004, before Verner ran for office, her husband

and the company's president, Marc Lacroix, put her on the LXB payroll instead of splitting that money with other shareholders.

Lacroix and Verner insist that she worked for LXB from the family home. The case goes to trial next year.

Also contentious, at least among international-development-community activists, was Verner's handling of her former responsibilities for the Canadian International Development Agency. "CIDA doesn't get the best ministers, but she was poor even by CIDA standards," said Amir Attaran, Canada Research Chair in law, population health and global development policy at the University of Ottawa. "She had no discernible vision on development, no discernible passion.

That was a problem in her last job and it may be a problem in Heritage." Attaran tangled with Verner's department at least twice in the past 18 months. Stymied by his failed Access to Information request on what was happening with Canadian aid projects in Afghanistan, he went public last January, complaining that the federal government had released not one single audit of its spending on aid projects there.

"This is the foreign-aid equivalent of the sponsorship scandal," he said at the time. Attaran is still angry. "Afghanistan is not performing, but CIDA can't tell us how they're spending the money," he said.

The activist professor also fought with Verner over a modest but successful Red Cross project to alleviate malaria in Africa by giving away insecticide-treated bed nets, to which CIDA initially gave \$26-million. "This project is listed on CIDA's website as saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of children," Attaran said, "but it took a year and a half of our begging for them not to pull out entirely. The project got cut to \$20-million." Observers say that Verner is likely to be a stronger performer in her new Heritage portfolio, for two reasons: For her, it's closer to home than Africa and Afghanistan and, for the Prime Minister, it's important that she succeed.

"This is not an issue of her personality," Pineau said, "but where she stands in the pecking order."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: government; political; biography; culture

PERSONAL NAME: Josee Verner

ORGANIZATION NAME: Cabinet

U.S., Afghan forces battle Taliban in Tora Bora

IDNUMBER 200708160025
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 116

KABUL – Hundreds of U.S. and Afghan soldiers attacked al–Qaeda positions in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, as a bomb blast claimed by the Taliban killed three German nationals in the capital, officials said.

The air and ground assault in the mountainous Tora Bora region, near the border with Pakistan, was launched about a day ago against carefully targeted positions, U.S. military spokeswoman Capt. Vanessa Bowman said.

Fugitive al–Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was last spotted in the Tora Bora mountains in 2001.

Capt. Bowman said the mountainous and remote region is an ideal environment to conceal militant support bases and training sites.

"The targets were carefully chosen to pinpoint enemy positions and eliminate the likelihood of harming innocent civilians," she said.

Afghan media reports said several Taliban had been killed in the operation, but this was not independently confirmed

Taliban secrets revealed; How-to manual 'shows significant level of sophistication' within terror organization

IDNUMBER 200708160024
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: ISLAMABAD
BYLINE: Isambard Wilkinson and Ashraf Ali
SOURCE: The Daily Telegraph
WORD COUNT: 558

ISLAMABAD – The Taliban have published its first military field manual detailing how to spring ambushes, run spies and conduct an insurgency against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

At 144 pages, Military Teachings for the Preparation of Mujahedeen is a minutely detailed how-to book on subjects ranging from tactics and weapons to building training camps and spycraft.

The guide, which is similar in its aims to American military field manuals, was obtained by The Daily Telegraph from a source in Pakistan who claimed to be close to the Taliban. Its cover bears the image of two crossed swords and the Koran, the arms of the Taliban's ousted government in Afghanistan.

The book, written in the Pashto language, "will soon be made available to the commanders in Afghanistan, as well as its adjacent tribal areas in Pakistan," the source said. He added that copies of the manual had been circulated to the Pakistani tribal area of Bajaur.

Its publication highlights the extent of the Taliban's revival six years after it was deposed by a U.S.-led invasion.

"This is the first of its kind and shows a significant level of organization," said Brig. Mahmood Shah, a retired military intelligence officer who was in charge of security in the tribal areas.

Brig. Shah said "soft" Pakistani government policy toward the pro-Taliban militants had allowed them to flourish in the lawless ethnic Pashtun tribal areas that straddle the Afghan-Pakistani border.

Maulana Nek Zaman, an MP from North Waziristan, where security forces and area pro-Taliban militants are engaged in daily skirmishes, said the manual had a potentially large readership.

"It is not a case of just Taliban who are fighting, but all the tribes are resisting because they have been attacked," he said.

Last year, the Taliban published a pocket-sized code of conduct which described suicide bombers as "Omar's missiles," referring to the Taliban's spiritual leader, Mullah Omar.

The military manual is divided into 10 chapters, and appears to be the result of a collaboration between religious scholars and specialists in terrorist, logistical and intelligence tactics. It is illustrated with simple formulas for the preparation of explosives, pictures and diagrams of light and heavy weaponry, ammunition and communication equipment.

The bulk of the manual details basic military skills such as firing positions and how to use different weapons.

It advises on how to carry out remotely controlled attacks on enemy vehicles, and shows how to strike aircraft and armoured vehicles by targeting weak points. It shows with diagrams how to target vehicles passing through rough terrain at low speed, and how telephone poles and trees can be used to range in on a target. And it explores methods of blowing up bridges, railway tracks and power and telephone lines.

Its preface sets out the Taliban's justification for war: "In a situation where infidels and their crooks are ruling the world, it is the prime duty of all the Muslims to take arms and crush those who are bent upon crushing the Muslims throughout the world.

"This is the best time to take on the usurpers and occupants of our holy land. They should be killed, slaughtered and destroyed."

It sets out to convince women and children to join the Taliban movement with the aid of verses from the Koran.

"In this situation, the children are not bound to seek the permission of their parents; a woman should go to jihad without the permission of her husband, a slave without the permission of his master, a student without the permission of his teacher, could go to jihad. And this is totally applicable in the prevailing situation where the infidels have occupied the land of the Muslims in Afghanistan," it states.

'Terrorist' label means U.S. set for Iran attack, experts say; Bush 'ups the ante' with harsh words against military unit

IDNUMBER 200708160002
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.16
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 745

WASHINGTON – A U.S. decision to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a foreign terrorist organization fuelled speculation yesterday that the White House is laying the groundwork for air strikes against the hardline Islamic nation before President George W. Bush leaves office.

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"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. air force colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge. Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state."

In Crawford, Texas, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any possible actions" the U.S. is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard, an elite military force that operates outside Iran's regular army.

But several high-ranking U.S. officials said Mr. Bush has already made a decision to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group that threatens the U.S.

The administration could formally announce the move as early as next month ahead of United Nations Security Council meetings in New York, when the U.S. will seek tougher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

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The plan is reportedly the brainchild of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and is thought to be aimed at showing Bush administration hawks — particularly Vice-President Dick Cheney — that the State Department is ready to take a more unilateral, confrontational approach with Iran if diplomacy fails.

A formal designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as terrorists could also provide Mr. Bush political cover should he decide on future military strikes inside Iran, allowing the White House to contend attacks were approved under the post-9/11 congressional authorization for war against terror groups.

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Officials in Tehran initially scoffed at news of Washington's plan.

"Such a report is in the framework of the propaganda and psychological activity of the American administration against the Islamic Republic of Iran," a senior Iranian official told IRNA, the country's official news agency.

Some analysts said the U.S. move to escalate tensions with Iran could backfire, making it more difficult to reach a negotiated agreement on disputes over nuclear energy and Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Rather than being cowed into backing down, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is just as likely to respond by stepping up anti-U.S. activities in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr. Gardiner believes.

"There are some within the (Bush) administration who believe the only reason the Iranians are not behaving is that they don't believe we are serious," he said. "The problem is that it misunderstands the Iranians. The Iranians understand we are serious, but are not going to be pushed around."

Even as news of the new U.S. tactic emerged, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced his force's missiles are now capable of striking targets throughout the Persian Gulf.

Yahya Rahim Safavi, the Guard's commander-in-chief, warned no rival warships could pass through the region's waters without risk of being struck by Iranian weapons.

"Our coast-to-sea missile systems can now reach the breadth and length of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea," Mr. Safavi said in a speech, according to Iran's Fars news agency.

To view a video report on heightened tensions between the U.S. and Iran, go to Today's Videos at ottawacitizen.com

T.O. TERROR ACCUSED TOLD IT'S 'US VS. THEM'; Report Examines 'Radicalization' Of Western Muslims

IDNUMBER 200708160140

PUBLICATION: National Post

DATE: 2007.08.16

EDITION: National

SECTION: News

PAGE: A1CP

ILLUSTRATION: Graphic/Diagram: Jonathon Rivait, National Post / (Seehardcopy for Graphic) ; Color Photo: / Steven Chand and another man took new-found fervor to recruit more young people, according to a U.S. intelligence report. ;

BYLINE: Stewart Bell

SOURCE: National Post

WORD COUNT: 780

A U.S. intelligence report released yesterday identifies Canadian Qayyum Abdul Jamal as the "spiritual sanctioner" of a group accused of plotting terrorist attacks in Toronto and Ottawa.

The New York Police Department report says Mr. Jamal, the eldest of 18 terror suspects arrested by the RCMP around Toronto last summer, helped young men "progress to the next stage of radicalization."

He was particularly influential on suspected ringleaders Fahim Ahmad and Zakaria Amara, as well as Saad Khalid, whom he had met at the Al Rahman Islamic Centre in Mississauga, the report says.

"Abdul Jamal was known by the other congregants to have an 'us-versus-them' view of the world in which Muslims were being oppressed by the West. He had no formal religious role in the mosque but his radical views were tolerated by the leadership because he cleaned the mosque for free," the report says.

"Abdul Jamal also had a reputation for reaching out to young people, taking them camping, playing basketball, etc. The suspects soon began to be influenced by his views and adopted them as their own."

The report by the NYPD Intelligence Division is an attempt to understand why young Westerners are joining terrorist groups inspired by al-Qaeda. Canadian counterterrorism officials briefed the NYPD prior to the report's publication. The police force also has an officer posted in Toronto.

The report examines recent cases of "homegrown" terrorism in Britain, Madrid, Germany, Amsterdam, Australia, the United States and Toronto. In each case, it says, the suspects were influenced by spiritual figures who preach an "us-versus-them/war on Islam" mentality that provides a moral justification for violence. They are vital to terrorist groups because they frame violence as a religious duty.

"The sanctioner is often a self-taught Islamic scholar and will spend countless hours providing a cut-and-paste version of Islam which radicalizes his followers. In many cases, the sanctioner is not involved in any operational planning but is vital in creating the jihadi mindset," it says.

In all the cases looked at by the NYPD, the suspects went through a remarkably similar process of radicalization that was triggered not by oppression or suffering but by a search for identity that went astray and led them to extremist Islam.

The Toronto suspects were no different, it says.

"Similar to the many of those involved in the other plots and attacks, the Toronto plotters also struggled with their identity as evidenced by this excerpt from a poem that was posted on the Internet by Zakaria Amara in 2001: 'Please someone find me, I want to find the light, but no one is there to guide me, open the door someone give me it's [sic] key.' "

The report calls this the "self-identification" phase of radicalization, in which suspects begin converting to fundamentalist beliefs.

They may become alienated from their former life, seek like-minded believers, grow a beard, wear traditional Muslim dress and give up drinking.

The next stage is indoctrination. Suspects will often withdraw from the mosque and become more politicized, blaming global events on a perceived Western war against Muslims, the police report says.

The Toronto group was indoctrinated through spiritual mentors and on the Internet, where they watched jihadist videos and communicated with like-minded radicals in places such as Bosnia and the United Kingdom, it says.

"The Mississauga group went as far as wearing combat fatigues to the mosque — a fact that was noted as unusual by the other congregants, but not reported to authorities," says the report.

"In Scarborough, convert Steven Vikash Chand and another suspect, Mohamed Durrani took their new-found fervor to recruit more young people. Both spent time at the campus of a local high school where they were able to convince the youngest members of the group to join in."

The final stage of radicalization, called jihadization, occurs when suspects commit to violence. They may undergo training, either at home or abroad.

The RCMP arrested 12 adults and five juveniles last June 2, and an 18th man was arrested in August. Charges have been stayed against three of the youths.

The arrests followed a two-year investigation started by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Police have accused the men of belonging to a terrorist group that was plotting to detonate truck bombs in downtown Toronto and to storm Parliament, take MPs hostage and behead the prime minister on television unless Canada withdrew its troops from Afghanistan and released all Muslim prisoners.

They have been accused under anti-terror legislation of contributing to the activity of a terrorist group, and several other related charges.

A preliminary hearing is taking place in Brampton, Ont., but the court has placed a ban on reporting the proceedings. All have pleaded not guilty.

The report said U.S. Muslims were not as vulnerable to radicalization as those in other countries but the Council on American Islamic Relations lobby group complained the report had "cast a pall of suspicion over the entire American Muslim community."

KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; RELIGION; CRIME; CANADA; ONTARIO

U.S. TO LABEL ELITE GUARD TERRORISTS; Iranian Corps; 'From A Policy Perspective, It's Huge': Specialist

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WASHINGTON – The U.S. decision to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a foreign terrorist organization fuelled speculation yesterday the White House is laying the groundwork for air strikes against the hardline Islamic nation before George W. Bush, the U.S. President, leaves office.

Foreign policy analysts were surprised by the move, which would mark the first time in history the U.S. has formally declared the armed forces of a sovereign nation to be terrorists.

"The United States has chosen to up the ante against Iran. This is a warning, or an indicator, that a major policy shift is unfolding within the Bush administration," said retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Sam Gardiner, an Iran policy specialist and former war games planner at the National War College in Washington.

"From a policy perspective, it's huge," he said.

"Never in the history of warfare has another country declared another's' armed forces to be a separate instrument from the state."

In Crawford, Tex., where Mr. Bush is on vacation, Dana Perino, a White House spokeswoman, said, "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any possible actions" the United States is planning to curb the activities of the Revolutionary Guard, an elite military force that operates outside Iran's regular army.

But in strategic leaks to media outlets, several high-ranking U.S. officials said Mr. Bush has already decided to sign an executive order classifying the Revolutionary Guard a "specially designated global terrorist" group that threatens the U.S.'s security and economic interests.

The administration could formally announce the move as early as next month before the UN Security Council meets in New York, when the U.S. will seek tougher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

The U.S. military has also repeatedly accused the Revolutionary Guard, particularly its covert al-Quds Force, of supplying weapons to Shiite insurgents fighting U.S. troops in Iraq.

The Revolutionary Guard "is well-known to be engaged in" terrorist activities and the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, said Sean McCormack, a U.S. State Department spokesman.

"We are confronting Iran's behaviour in arming and providing material support to those groups that are going after our troops."

The Revolutionary Guard operates naval, land and air forces independent of Iran's regular armed forces.

Recently, it expanded its domestic operations to include commercial ventures ranging from oil production to infrastructure projects.

The expected designation of the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization would allow the U.S. to freeze any financial assets it has with U.S. companies, but a larger goal is to increase pressure on international firms to cut ties with Iran.

The plan was reportedly dreamed up by Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, and is thought to be aimed at showing Bush administration hawks, particularly Dick Cheney, the Vice-President, that the State Department is ready to take a more unilateral confrontational approach with Iran if diplomacy fails.

Formally designating the Revolutionary Guard as terrorists could also provide Mr. Bush with political cover if he decides on future military strikes inside Iran.

The White House could argue any attacks were approved under

the post-9/11 congressional authorization for war against terror groups.

"If the U.S. had decided on the Cheney option, this is what we would do as a way of preparing for it," Col. Gardiner said.

"The new Cheney option includes air strikes against terrorist training camps inside Iran," he said.

Officials in Tehran initially scoffed at news of the Washington's plan.

"Such a report is in the framework of the propaganda and psychological activity of the American administration against the Islamic Republic of Iran," a senior Iranian official told IRNA, the country's official news agency.

Some analysts said the U.S. move could backfire, making it more difficult to reach a negotiated agreement on disputes over nuclear energy and Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Col. Gardiner believes Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the bellicose Iranian President, is just as likely to respond by stepping up anti-U.S. activities in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

"There are some within the [Bush] administration who believe the only reason the Iranians are not behaving is that they don't believe we are serious," he said.

"The problem is that it misunderstands the Iranians. The Iranians understand we are serious but are not going to be pushed around."

Even as news of the new U.S. tactic emerged, Yahya Rahim Safavi, the Revolutionary Guard's commander-in-chief, announced that his force's missiles are now capable of striking targets throughout the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Safavi warned no rival warships could pass through the region's waters without risk of being hit by Iranian weapons.

"Our coast-to-sea missile systems can now reach the breadth and length of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea," Mr. Safavi said in a speech carried by Iran's Fars news agency.

REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS – Officially the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or Pasdaran. – Formed after 1979 revolution. – Loyal to clerics and counter to regular military. – Estimated 125,000 troops. – Includes ground forces, navy, air force, intelligence and special forces. – Has political influence: dozens of ex-guards sit as MPs. – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a former member.

Source: Globalsecurity.org

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Rule book on proselytizing takes 'major step' forward; 'Sheep Stealing' Creates Mounting Antagonism

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GENEVA – A drive by Christian churches to agree on a code of conduct on how they win converts has been boosted by the decision of a major evangelical movement to join in, the World Council of Churches (WCC) said yesterday.

At a gathering in Toulouse, southern France, last week, the Vancouver–based World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), which says it represents 420 million believers in 128 countries, announced it would sign up to the project.

"We see this as a major step forward on the way to getting the code agreed among organizations representing a huge body of Christians," said spokesman Juan Michel of the WCC, which is leading the project jointly with the Vatican.

Mr. Michel said a draft of the code, which will be voluntary but will establish what methods should be banned for Christians in missionary and proselytizing work, was expected to be debated at another meeting next year and finalized by 2010.

The WEA focuses on spreading the Christian gospel and was for years at odds with the WCC, which groups movements that emphasize ecumenism, or finding common ground among faiths.

But recently it has moved closer to the WCC, whose member churches —including the Greek, Russian and other Orthodox faiths as well as major Protestant movements such as the World Lutheran Federation — represent 560 million believers.

Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and indigenous religious traditions were invited to play an active part in the process when it was launched in 2006.

There is mounting antagonism in some Islamic countries toward Christians suspected of trying to spread their faith among Muslims.

Controversies in recent years include the arrest of a Christian convert from Islam, Abdul Rahman, in Afghanistan in 2006 on charges of apostasy, and the role of evangelical "crusades" in India and Sri Lanka.

More recently, the fiercely Islamic Taliban seized 23 South Korean church workers as hostages in Afghanistan.

Officials involved in the code project say the rulebook would be meant to

apply to all proselytizing, both between and among faiths — sometimes dubbed "sheep stealing."

In Latin America, Africa and Asia, there has been tension setting Catholics and mainstream Protestant churches against evangelizing groups seen as unfairly competing to win souls.

When the WCC and the Vatican launched the effort last year, they declared although freedom to choose a religion was a "non-negotiable" human right anywhere in the world, what they called "the obsession of converting others" had to be cured.

The WCC report of the meeting did not specify which conversion methods might be banned, saying deciding this was "a daunting task given the many contexts involved."

These included "living as a Christian minority in India," "preaching the gospel to Turks in Austria" and "being a Lutheran missionary to Muslim Nigeria," The code should also "address other religions' concerns about Christian proselytism."

"Although these are very preliminary findings, the fact that representatives from all these walks of Christian life have been able to meet and discuss such a complex issue, starting to build a consensus, is in itself a success," said the Reverend Hans Ucko, WCC's senior official dealing with interreligious dialogue and co-operation.

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Maxime Bernier: not crazy

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In this week's Cabinet shuffle, Maxime Bernier became Canada's new Foreign Affairs Minister. He is an excellent choice—a bilingual Quebecer with healthy libertarian leanings. Since he's being tasked with the thankless job of selling Canada's mission in Afghanistan to skeptical French Canadians, it doesn't hurt that he also comes across as a genuine and trustworthy person. We don't know for certain how he'll perform with the new portfolio. But as this editorial board pointed out yesterday, the telecom deregulation he accomplished during his short stint as industry minister is encouraging. And to think that I once thought Maxime Bernier was crazy.

Long, long ago in a time before it looked like the Conservatives had any chance of winning the 2006 election, a colleague and I had lunch (or possibly breakfast — I just remember the coffee) with Mr. Bernier when he was in Toronto. He had recently decided to run for the Tories in the Beauce riding south of Quebec City in anticipation of his first federal election campaign (though no election had been called yet).

As he happily expressed his optimistic view that Quebecers would help push the Conservatives into power in 2006, in part because of French Canadians' strong sense of individualism, I smiled politely. It sounded like a pleasant delusion. Being idealistic does that to you, I thought to myself. Reality takes a backseat to make risks seem — well, less risky. Yes, it seemed possible that Bernier himself could take Beauce given his strong credentials and family history in the area. But the rest of the province? Forget it.

When all was said and done, it was obviously Bernier who was correct and me who was crazy, or at the least, short-sighted. The Tories ultimately took 10 seats in Quebec, and Bernier won his Beauce riding with 67% of the vote. When that happened, I thought back on our chat over coffee and was genuinely impressed. Not because Bernier had so accurately predicted the future at a time when any rational oddsmaker would have had him committed. But because a rare thing had happened. Someone who had entered politics for the right reasons — to defend his ideals and promote freedom — had actually gotten ahead. This was someone who couldn't have known the prize (if a Cabinet position is to be considered a prize) that awaited him, but stuck his neck out just the same.

Do I think that Maxime Bernier will ultimately have the ability to single-handedly overcome the Leviathan of our bloated government? Sadly, no. Stephen Harper has proven a good example of how the assumption of power inevitably bends and stretches once firmly held ideals. And physics seems to dictate that the greater the power, the bendier those ideals become.

But as a man who got into government because he wanted to promote liberty, rather than himself, Bernier should at least cause far less harm than most of his peers.