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Karzai blasts U.S., NATO for 'careless operations'; Leader angry over killing of more than 90 civilians

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Herald Archive, AFP–Getty Images / AfghanPresident Hamid Karzai: "Afghan life is not cheap, and it should not be treated as such." ;

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

DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Griff Witte

SOURCE: The Washington Post

WORD COUNT: 485

KABUL, Afghanistan – Afghan President Hamid Karzai chastised U.S. and NATO–led troops Saturday for their "careless operations" and accused them of killing more than 90 civilians in the past 10 days, as fresh reports emerged of more noncombatant deaths.

Using some of his strongest language yet against the foreign forces that occupy his country, Karzai asserted: "Afghan life is not cheap, and it should not be treated as such.

"We do not want any more military operations without co–ordinating them with the Afghan government," a visibly angry Karzai said at a news conference in Kabul. "From now onwards, they have to work the way we ask them to work in here."

It was unclear late Saturday whether Karzai's statement indicated he plans to formally restrict the operations of the 32,000 NATO–led troops and 21,000 U.S.–led troops who patrol Afghanistan.

Karzai has the power to place limits on what foreign forces can do here, though any attempt to exert that control would probably produce a strong backlash from the U.S. and other countries that contribute troops to Afghanistan. Military officials from those nations have said they need to act aggressively to quell a stubborn Taliban insurgency, and they say militants are deliberately provoking civilian deaths by hiding in residential areas.

Spokesmen for the NATO and U.S.–led forces declined to comment on Karzai's statements.

Karzai, a pro–western leader who has generally welcomed international troops over the past 5 1/2 years, spoke after a series of incidents in recent days in which dozens of civilians have allegedly been killed in U.S. and NATO–led air strikes.

Accusations of another such incident came Saturday, when the Pakistani military spokesman, Maj.–Gen. Waheed Arshad, said international troops had fired rockets across the border overnight Friday and killed 10 civilians, including children. Arshad said three or four houses were destroyed in the attack, and 14 people were injured.

Karzai blasts U.S., NATO for 'careless operations'; Leader angry over killing of more than 90 civilians

"We have protested about what happened," Arshad said. "They were innocent people."

A NATO forces spokesman, Maj. John Thomas, acknowledged the Pakistani report and said the civilian death toll could end up being higher than 10.

Thomas said NATO and U.S. forces were fighting about 50 Taliban insurgents along the Afghan–Pakistani border — the largest contingent observed there in the past six months — and that some of their firing was directed into the Pakistani side. "It was a fluid situation," he said. "At some point, the activities did cross the border."

Thomas said the insurgents were killed. The fighting took place in the Afghan province of Paktika and the Pakistani tribal land of North Waziristan, areas where militant activity is heavy and the border is porous.

International troops operating in Afghanistan are not supposed to attack into Pakistan, though it has happened on numerous occasions.

Earlier this month, residents of a Pakistani border village reported seeing an aerial drone fire missiles in an attack that killed more than 30 people.

In other incidents disclosed Saturday, a coalition soldier was killed in fighting in Helmand province and at least 20 suspected insurgents were killed in neighbouring Kandahar, according to U.S.–led forces.

Bomb kills Alberta soldiers

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COLUMN: Week in Review
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 72

Three Alberta soldiers were killed Wednesday in Afghanistan. They were travelling between checkpoints a few hundred metres apart when their open-top, unarmoured all-terrain vehicle hit a roadside bomb.

Dead are Sgt. Christos Karigiannis, 31, Cpl. Stephen Bouzane, 26, and Pte. Joel Wiebe, 22, all from the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. The deaths brought to 60 the number of Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

A Tourist in Kabul; In this shattered capital, the challenge is staying alive

IDNUMBER 200706240095

PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)

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PAGE: A2

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Ahmad Masood, Reuters / GOLFERS, BEWARE: The Kabul Golf Course is one giant hazard. It's par for the course in a dust-covered city struggling to recover from a violent past. ;

DATELINE: KABUL

BYLINE: Don Martin

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 817

KABUL – For war-and-gore tourists, welcome to the pleasuredome. Ruins and rubble are everywhere here, missile strikes and bullet holes are as common as peeled roof shingles in Canada, and grisly historic sites are usually only a few street corners away.

Believe it or not, there are tourist guides for visitors to the battered and blown-up Afghan capital, but they were published in the 1970s, missing the civil war attractions and events from the Taliban's ruthless 1996–2002 reign.

Kabul today is a dust-covered city of walls topped with barbed wire, driveways blocked by rifle-bearing security guards, chaotic traffic jams, noisy markets, nightly blackouts, and curfews on residents still struggling to recover from their city's violent past.

Not that this city, with a population of three million at last count, lacks for a certain unique charm. People are friendly, industrious, full of civic pride and don't seem to live in perpetual fear that the glassy-eyed man boarding the bus is about to blow the entire passenger list into the afterlife.

Here, then, is a day in Kabul, tourist-style, from the viewpoint of a Canadian newspaper columnist.

10 a.m. Kabul Zoo

A pile of rubble marks the entrance of what used to be the world's most infamous zoo. That's the sort of claim to fame you get when your prized 25-year-old elephant is killed by a rocket landing in her cage during a civil war. Then again, the zoo's real claim to fame was Marjan, a lion who devoured a Taliban fighter who strayed inside his enclosure in 1997, before suffering a retaliatory grenade blast from the day-before dinner's outraged brother. Half blind, lame and toothless, Marjan went on to outlive Taliban rule before dying in 2002 of old age.

His former enclosure is weed-infested and empty now. Somewhere in there is the burial plot of the beast, but darned if I could see it. I'm not sure what happened to the two lions China had sent as replacement gifts and the gatekeeper just shrugged at the query.

It's a zoo crying out for animal-rights activists to campaign for its closure. The lone wolf is thin enough to pass for a fox. The one unhappy brown bear swims in a tiny algae-filled pool. The best collection in the zoo seems to be, ironically, the vultures.

11 a.m. The King's Tomb

There's a certain Afghan symmetry to having the Father of the Nation's remains locked in marble under a domed mausoleum, shredded by gunfire and rocket grenades fired from civil war opponents on an opposing hillside.

Overlooking a sprawling swath of Kabul's ramshackle housing, the final resting place of Mohammed Nadir Shah, who was assassinated in 1933, is officially closed to the public. A five-dollar-American bribe to the caretaker got us inside. There, in the basement, we saw the king's tomb, surrounded by 14 royal relatives and the gravel patch in the floor reserved for the current title-only king, Zahir Shah, now 92 and ailing. The money's run out for the restoration, leaving the fragments of wall marble held in place by a rickety wooden frame.

12:15 p.m. Babur Gardens

This 11-hectare "garden" dating back to the 16th century is the burial site of the Babur Shah, former king of Afghanistan. Foreigners are charged 20 times the entrance fee for locals, but it's still only an American buck so there's no complaining here. It's filled with struggling rose gardens and patchy grass but there are signs a restoration project is proceeding slowly. Still, this mostly empty retreat from the chaos outside its walls would qualify as a third-class getaway in North America. My guides can't wait to leave.

2:30 p.m. Kabul Stadium

Nobody's quite sure if the weekly crowds of 25,000 who came out during the Taliban reign were attracted by the soccer game or the amputations and executions of harsh Islamic justice. But just outside the home team's goal line, hundreds of men and women were routinely killed or maimed, having been convicted, rightly or wrongly, of murder, adultery or thievery. As soon as the blood was soaked up with white powder and the severed appendages thrown into the crowd, teams took the field for soccer.

The field remains in good shape by Afghan standards and soccer is still played here. But, given its history, one can only imagine the International Olympic Committee cringing at the sight of the Olympic rings hanging on the stadium's nameplate.

4 p.m. Ariana Square

We drive by the heavily protected patch of grass near the presidential palace where former president Dr. Najibullah and his brother met their unfortunate demise. Taliban fighters knocked down the door of the United Nations building where they were hiding in 1996, dragged them across the road and hanged them from a pole.

No sign of the pole now. Just another patch of ground, beside streets filled with people engaged in a struggling existence, oblivious to the bloody events of their past.

In Kabul, after all, reliving history always takes a distant second to staying alive today.

Angry Karzai lashes out against civilian casualties

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Hamid Karzai: Civilian casualties "notacceptable." ;
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Sardar Ahmad
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 381

KABUL, Afghanistan — President Hamid Karzai angrily criticized yesterday "indiscriminate and unprecise" operations by NATO– and U.S.–led forces in Afghanistan, which he said had killed 90 civilians in just over a week.

The grim–faced president told reporters that one recent operation had killed 52 people in three days of fighting in the southern province of Uruzgan.

"Attacks causing civilian casualties, as I have said before, are not acceptable for us. It is no longer tolerated," Karzai told reporters.

"As you are aware over the past several days, as a result of indiscriminate and unprecise operations of NATO and coalition forces, our people suffered casualties," he said, flanked by his defence minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak.

He listed four operations over the past 10 days, the most deadly being the one in Uruzgan's Chora district.

"In Chora, NATO [and] coalition forces fired artillery on Chora from Tirin Kot in which according to our latest information ... 52 of our countrymen were martyred," Karzai said, speaking at his palace in the capital.

The NATO force said that Karzai's figure for the number of civilian dead was similar to its own but that it was unclear if they had been killed by security forces or Taliban fighters.

The president also referred to strikes by the NATO–led International Security Assistance Force in the southern province of Helmand early Friday that police said killed 25 people, including nine women and three young children.

The president said his repeated calls on the ISAF and U.S.–led coalition to coordinate their operations with Afghan security forces to avoid hurting civilians had gone unheeded.

"From now onwards they have to work the way we ask them to work here. That's the line," he said.

An umbrella body of non–government groups said this week its figures showed that troops had killed nearly 250 civilians this year.

This was happening because of "the extreme use of force, the disproportionate use of force to a situation and the lack of co-ordination with the Afghan government," Karzai said.

"You don't fight a terrorist by firing a field gun 37 kilometres away into a target. That's definitely, surely bound to cause civilian casualties," he said.

Afghanistan was thankful for the international community's help against insurgents, he said.

"But Afghan life is not cheap, and it should not be treated as such," he said, reflecting a feeling among many ordinary Afghans who find the foreign forces arrogant and culturally insensitive.

Civilian casualties threatened the success of the international operation against the Taliban and its allies in al-Qaida, said Karzai.

The Taliban insurgency, launched after the extremist group was removed from government in late 2001, has steadily intensified, with both sides stepping up their action.

Taliban forces suffer heavy losses in battles

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 178

KABUL, Afghanistan — Dozens of Taliban were killed in southern and eastern Afghanistan overnight in clashes with U.S.-led foreign troops and Afghan forces, officials said yesterday.

A foreign coalition serviceman was also killed and two injured in Helmand province as days of sporadic, widespread clashes continued.

A spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force said troops clashed with a large group of insurgents near the porous Pakistan border in Paktika province, killing around 40 of them and wounding several others.

He said it was the biggest concentration of insurgent strength since January, when more than 100 were killed while crossing the border.

In the Sha Wali Kot district of Kandahar province, at least 20 suspected Taliban terrorists were killed in a seven-hour gunbattle. Several others were killed in at least three other engagements, the U.S. military said.

A statement from the U.S.-led foreign force said a coalition soldier was killed and two others injured when their patrol was attacked in Helmand province. Their nationality was not immediately released.

Violence has surged in Afghanistan in recent months after a traditional winter lull, with foreign forces attacking Taliban strongholds in the south and east.

Latest military deaths highlight Afghan challenge

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COLUMN: Don Martin
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Don Martin
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 594

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The dark arts of the Afghan insurgency changed when the Taliban planted a pair of powerful anti-tank mines that killed three Canadian soldiers instantly, admits the battle group commander.

Col. Rob Walker has a reputation for blunt talk, and even he's not sure what exactly to make of his enemy after the safest spot in his quietest district, smack dab between two soldier-manned checkpoints, exploded into a bloodbath during a routine morning delivery run.

It was considered so safe, Walker said Friday, that he had no qualms about authorizing soldiers to use an unarmoured glorified golf cart called a Gator to shuttle supplies while reconstruction and humanitarian work was proceeding in the Panjwaii valley.

The Canadian military pulled the Gator from its service in Afghanistan Friday.

But, while troops were looking away from what they believed was a secure area, Taliban fighters crept in behind their backs to plant the lethal bombs, in a defiant show of violence clearly designed to spook wavering villagers into fearing their return.

"The insurgency is changing. It's a different dynamic," Walker said, after ordering the small cargo carts removed from resupply duty.

"They're not strong enough to confront us directly," he said.

But, he added, the Taliban message hammered home to his soldiers with deadly force is unmistakable: "We're not gone, and we're targeting you."

It's a startling admission and, ironically, tilts toward the arguments used by military opponents pointing out the futility of Canada's mission, which is set to end in early 2009.

Take the view of Rory Stewart, the acclaimed author who published a bestselling story of his walk across a dangerously lawless Afghanistan in 2002, two months after the Taliban were driven from power.

Now heading a foundation in Kabul, he says Canada must abandon its doomed military folly in Kandahar and regroup in the north, where it has a reasonable chance of success.

"You can only do real development projects in areas where the local population supports you, consents to your presence and wants to participate," Stewart told me in an interview.

"By and large in the Kandahar area, we don't have that kind of consent. A powerful and effective minority is trying to kill us while the majority is sitting on the fence, so it's extremely unlikely Canada's going to make much of an impact in southern Afghanistan."

You ask the obvious question: Would Stewart repeat his 2002 trek across southern Afghanistan today?

"Not a hope. I couldn't even consider it," he says.

"I would expect to be kidnapped within 10 to 20 minutes."

While the Canadian colonel is a long way from conceding defeat, there's no doubt the spike in insurgent activity surrounding Kandahar has left Walker perplexed and, perhaps, a tad rattled.

The war has raged for five years, yet the Taliban still have the capacity to mine a district where the Canadian military claims to have the confidence and co-operation of tribal leaders.

It's a head-scratcher all right.

Yet the sentiments of Mohammad Atmar, a soft-spoken cabinet minister in the Karsai government who speaks impeccable English, are hard to ignore.

If Canada and others leave, Taliban terrorism will prevail and hard-won freedoms will disappear, he said in an interview.

"Canada's got to remember its self-interest in security," Atmar said, sucking back a series of Marlboro cigarettes. "Those people who think that 'the U.S. was hit, Europe was hit, eastern Asia was hit and so we will not be hit' are wrong. They will be hit. And if they fail here, that army of brutality will return to claim Afghanistan. This time they will be more brutal. And Canadians will not feel safe."

Without Canadian support, the great strides in human rights and economic progress will also be reversed, Atmar warned.

"Afghanistan has never been so prosperous as it has been in its recent history," he says.

"Our country is now free. Is there any more important gift to a nation than freedom? Is there any other return on your tax investment that's more important?"

So there you have it — an Afghan clash of opinion that almost mirrors the great divide of Canadians as the debate on extending Canada's mission here beyond 2009 gathers steam.

But both sides agree on one point with absolute certainty — this country's future is still awash in considerable uncertainty.

Afghan leader slams NATO, U.S.; Karzai denounces 'careless' killings of civilians

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PAGE: A9

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Jason Straziuso

ILLUSTRATION: Afghan President Hamid Karzai arrives at a news conference at the presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. (FARZANA WAHIDY / AP)

WORD COUNT: 608

KABUL – President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.–led troops Saturday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians and warned that the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better."

In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said. The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western–backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

"Several times in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," Karzai said at a news conference in his Kabul palace.

The casualties listed by Karzai bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U.S.–led military operations this year to 211, according to an Associated Press tally of figures provided by Afghan and foreign officials and witnesses.

That tops the 172 civilians killed in militant attacks.

"If NATO forces want to be successful in their fight against terrorism and in bringing security to Afghanistan, they should co–ordinate with the Afghan government, no matter if the operation is small or big," Karzai said in a mixture of English and his native Pashto.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force responded contritely. "President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesman Nick Lunt said. "We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Foreign commanders insist they take great care to avoid civilian deaths while trying to beat back the Taliban so that Karzai's frail government can deliver services to the impoverished south and east. Both U.S. and NATO forces, however, rely heavily on devastating air power. That helps minimize foreign troop casualties while inflicting heavy losses on militants – but also regularly harms innocents.

"Every single ISAF commander knows and says that we can do our job here if we have the consent of the people. But unlike the Taliban, we do not set out to cause civilian casualties, and that is a critical difference," Lunt said.

Earlier Saturday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.-led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

NATO said militants attacked Afghan and alliance troops late Friday in Paktika province. The alliance said it was the largest insurgent formation seen in the area since January, when U.S. forces said they had killed about 130 of 180 militants crossing from Pakistan. Pakistan denied any insurgents had cross the frontier.

Extra troops have been deployed on both sides of the mountainous frontier in an attempt to prevent militants who find sanctuary in Pakistan's wild tribal regions from mounting crossborder raids and sustaining the five-year-old war.

Although Karzai also denounced the Taliban for killing civilians, he directed most of his anger at foreign forces.

Police said Friday that a NATO air strike in the southern province of Helmand had killed 25 civilians, along with 20 militants who were firing on NATO and Afghan troops from a walled compound. NATO blamed the insurgents for hiding among civilians and defended the right of its troops to defend themselves.

Last week, 52 civilians died when artillery was fired into Chora, a town in Uruzgan province where NATO troops fought the Taliban for three days.

"We want to co-operate with the international community. We are thankful for their help to Afghanistan," Karzai said. "But that does not mean that Afghan lives have no value."

Afghan leader blasts NATO, U.S. forces for civilian deaths 90 people killed in single week

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EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
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DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Sardar Ahmad
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 327

KABUL – President Hamid Karzai yesterday angrily criticized "indiscriminate and unprecise" operations by NATO and U.S.–led forces in Afghanistan, which he said had killed 90 civilians in just more than a week.

The grim–faced president told reporters that one recent operation had killed 52 people in three days of fighting in the southern province of Uruzgan.

"Attacks causing civilian casualties, as I have said before, are not acceptable for us. It is no longer tolerated," Mr. Karzai told reporters.

"As you are aware over the past several days, as result of indiscriminate and unprecise operations of NATO and coalition forces, our people suffered casualties," he said, flanked by his Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak.

He listed four operations over the past 10 days, the most deadly being the one in Uruzgan's Chora district.

"In Chora, NATO, coalition forces fired artillery on Chora from Tirin Kot in which, according to our latest information ... 52 of our countrymen were martyred," Mr. Karzai said, speaking at his palace in the capital.

The NATO force said Mr. Karzai's figure for the number of civilian dead was similar to its own, but that it was unclear if they had been killed by security forces or Taliban fighters.

The president also referred to strikes by the NATO–led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the southern province of Helmand early Friday that police said killed 25 people, including nine women and three young children.

The president said his repeated calls on the ISAF and U.S.–led coalition to co–ordinate their operations with Afghan security forces to avoid hurting civilians had gone unheeded.

"From now onwards they have to work the way we ask them to work here. That's the line," he said.

An umbrella body of non–government groups said this week its figures showed that troops had killed nearly 250 civilians this year.

This was happening because of "the extreme use of force, the disproportionate use of force to a situation and

the lack of co-ordination with the Afghan government," Mr. Karzai said.

"You don't fight a terrorist by firing a field gun 37 kilometres away into a target. That's definitely, surely bound to cause civilian casualties," he said.

Afghanistan was thankful for the international community's help against insurgents, he said.

"But Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," he said.

'Support our troops' message is a way to suppress dissent

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BYLINE: Diane V. McLoughlin
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 317

Re: 'We support our troops' banner to remain on display at Ottawa Airport, June 21.

No matter what anyone says, these "support our troops" stickers and banners are a jingoistic meaningless way to suppress dissent against this unnecessary aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq. (Canada is in Iraq too, with soldiers on exchange with U.S. units, but who could blame you for not knowing it?) "Support our troops" echoes the propaganda of totalitarian, militaristic regimes.

It gives the false impression that we are doing something positive in this world, and shields the truth of the carnage and senseless brutality reaped from military adventurism. Neo-conservatives are pushing the world to the precipice of a dangerous Third World War. They will use any means to try to shut down dissent. It has nothing to do with terrorism — that is, violence against the innocent without cause — and it never did.

Watch the neo-cons at work — when they've got nothing to convince you by way of persuasive argument based on fact, they get personal in a vicious and calculating way, instead. It had to be said and U.S. Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul finally said it: 9/11 did not happen because they hate us because of our freedoms.

He pounded home the point that it is because of all the stuff the West has been doing in the Middle East for years. The party leadership balked and an effort was even made to have Mr. Paul banned from future debates. There's the real nature of their democracy and freedom for you.

I support military means for defensive purposes and in extreme situations such as the prevention of genocide. Current action in the Middle East doesn't meet either test. I support our troops in this instance with my conviction that we ought to get our troops out of there and bring who's left home.

Diane V. McLoughlin,

Woodlawn

Count all the victims

IDNUMBER 200706240058
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DATE: 2007.06.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
BYLINE: Janet E. Harris
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 177

Re: Petawawa soldier killed,

2 others hurt in Afghan bomb blast, June 12.

Last week in the Citizen, you reported the tragic death of a Petawawa soldier in Afghanistan. The same day, seven Afghan police officers were killed by a U.S. bomb when the U.S. military mistook them for "the enemy." Then seven children were killed, again by a U.S. bomb, when the United States military bombed dwellings thought to house "insurgents."

In reporting on the Canadian soldier's death, the Citizen said that "the insurgency continues to take a bloody toll." Yes, there has been a bloody toll, not only of Canadian soldiers, but also of thousands of Afghan civilians, killed by both the U.S. and Canadian military. Who is counting the toll of wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, children and the elderly?

Noam Chomsky has said that we in North America and Europe know the exact number of our war dead, but the number of dead on the other side, inevitably in poor and non-white countries, is never counted. It seems that we don't think it important to count them.

Janet E. Harris,

Ottawa

Angry Karzai blasts NATO for civilian deaths; More than 90 innocents, including children, killed in past 10 days

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PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal

DATE: 2007.06.24

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

DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan

SOURCE: Washington Post

WORD COUNT: 429

KABUL, Afghanistan – Afghan President Hamid Karzai chastised U.S. and NATO–led troops Saturday for their "careless operations" and accused them of killing more than 90 civilians in the past 10 days, as fresh reports emerged of more noncombatant deaths.

Using some of his strongest language yet against the foreign forces that occupy his country, Karzai said, "Afghan life is not cheap, and it should not be treated as such."

"We do not want any more military operations without co–ordinating them with the Afghan government," a visibly angry Karzai said at a news conference in Kabul.

It was unclear late Saturday whether Karzai's statement indicated that he plans to formally restrict the operations of the 32,000 NATO–led troops and 21,000 U.S.–led troops who patrol Afghanistan.

Karzai has the power to place limits on what foreign forces can do here, though any attempt to exert that control would probably produce a strong backlash from the United States and other countries that contribute troops to Afghanistan.

Military officials from those nations have said they need to act aggressively to quell a stubborn Taliban insurgency, and they say militants are deliberately provoking civilian deaths by hiding in residential areas.

Karzai, a pro–Western leader who has generally welcomed international troops over the past five and a half years, spoke after a series of incidents in recent days in which dozens of civilians have allegedly been killed in U.S. and NATO–led air strikes.

Accusations of another such incident came Saturday, when the Pakistani military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Waheed Arshad, said international troops had fired rockets across the border overnight Friday and killed 10 civilians, including children. Arshad said that three or four houses were destroyed in the attack, and that 14 people were injured.

"We have protested about what happened," Arshad said. "They were innocent people."

NATO spokesman Maj. John Thomas, acknowledged the Pakistani report and said the civilian death toll could end up being higher than 10.

Angry Karzai blasts NATO for civilian deaths; More than 90 innocents, including children, killed in past 10 days

Thomas said NATO and U.S. forces were fighting about 50 Taliban insurgents along the Afghan–Pakistani border and some of their firing was directed into the Pakistani side.

"It was a fluid situation," he said. "At some point, the activities did cross the border."

Thomas said the insurgents were killed.

The fighting took place in the Afghan province of Paktika and the Pakistani tribal land of North Waziristan.

International troops operating in Afghanistan are not supposed to attack into Pakistan, though it has happened on numerous occasions. Earlier this month, residents of a Pakistani border village reported seeing an aerial drone fire missiles in an attack that killed more than 30 people.

In other incidents disclosed Saturday, a coalition soldier was killed in fighting in Helmand province and at least 20 suspected insurgents were killed in neighbouring Kandahar, according to U.S.–led forces.

Violence has spiked in Afghanistan in recent weeks, with the Taliban carrying out suicide attacks.

Karzai denounces NATO, U.S.-led forces; Says civilians were killed in 'careless' operations

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.06.24

SECTION: International

PAGE: A13

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Jason Straziuso

DATELINE: Kabul, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 614

Afghan President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.-led troops Saturday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians and warned that the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better."

In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said. The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western-backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

"Several times in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," Karzai said at a news conference in his Kabul palace.

The casualties listed by Karzai bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U.S.-led military operations this year to 211, according to an Associated Press tally of figures provided by Afghan and foreign officials and witnesses. That tops the 172 civilians killed in militant attacks.

"If NATO forces want to be successful in their fight against terrorism and in bringing security to Afghanistan, they should co-ordinate with the Afghan government, no matter if the operation is small or big," Karzai said in a mixture of English and his native Pashto.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force responded contritely. "President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesman Nick Lunt said. "We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Foreign commanders insist they take great care to avoid civilian deaths while trying to beat back the Taliban so that Karzai's frail government can deliver services to the impoverished south and east. Both U.S. and NATO forces, however, rely heavily on devastating air power. That helps minimize foreign troop casualties while inflicting heavy losses on militants – but also regularly harms innocents. Earlier Saturday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.-led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

NATO said militants attacked Afghan and alliance troops late Friday in Paktika province. The alliance said it was the largest insurgent formation seen in the area since January, when U.S. forces said they had killed around 130 of 180 militants crossing from Pakistan. Pakistan denied any insurgents had cross the frontier.

Extra troops have been deployed on both sides of the mountainous frontier in an attempt to prevent militants who find sanctuary in Pakistan's wild tribal regions from mounting crossborder raids and sustaining the five-year-old war.

Although Karzai also denounced the Taliban for killing civilians, he directed most of his anger at foreign forces.

Police said Friday that a NATO air strike in the southern province of Helmand had killed 25 civilians, along with 20 militants who were firing on NATO and Afghan troops from a walled compound. NATO blamed the insurgents for hiding among civilians and defended the right of its troops to defend themselves.

Last week, 52 civilians died when artillery was fired into Chora, a town in Uruzgan province where NATO troops fought the Taliban for three days.

"We want to co-operate with the international community. We are thankful for their help to Afghanistan," Karzai said. "But that does not mean that Afghan lives have no value."

Other fighting reported Saturday left some 20 militants and one coalition soldier dead. The soldier, who died in a firefight in the southern province of Helmand, was not identified.

Protesters in Quebec City target Afghan-bound troops

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.06.24

SECTION: National

PAGE: A8

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Dene Moore

DATELINE: Quebec

WORD COUNT: 468

Antiwar protesters chanting "Canada out of Afghanistan" evaded police Friday night and marched side-by-side for a time with Quebec soldiers as they paraded through the streets in fatigues.

While a small number of protesters tried to taunt soldiers as they marched in step, the antiwar contingent was far outnumbered by loved ones and supporters of the more than 2,000 members of the Royal 22nd Regiment, who will head to Kandahar this summer.

Alexis Miller, who was visiting Quebec City from Kamloops, B.C., said she was not happy with the protesters.

"I don't like it at all. You might not agree with the war, but you have to support your troops."

Soldiers from CFB Valcartier, known as the Van Doos, will deploy to Afghanistan en masse for the first time this summer. More than 2,000 Van Doos and a total of 2,500 troops will begin heading to Kandahar in July.

The military parade Friday set the scene for a show down.

"We're protesting ... the war," Sophie Schoen, one of the organizers, said from one of two school buses full of protesters headed to Quebec City to protest. "We have every right to be in the streets and show our opposition."

Schoen said politicians and top military brass are the target.

"Our aim is not a confrontation with the soldiers and their families," she said.

At the military base in Valcartier, organizers said they were not concerned about the protest.

"They're pacifists. Nobody's scared of pacifists because they're peaceful people," joked Capt. Mathieu Dufour, spokesman for the base. "We don't expect any problems."

But the stakes in Quebec are no joke.

Small numbers of the province's legendary "Fighting Van Doos" quietly deployed to Kandahar last December.

This time, there is nothing quiet about the deployment of 2,000 plus Van Doos throughout July and August.

Earlier this week, soldiers held a tail-gate party at a Montreal Alouettes game.

On Friday, Premier Jean Charest, Afghan Ambassador Omar Samad and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor were among those who honoured the soldiers at a ceremony before the parade.

With row upon row of soldiers at attention before him, Charest lauded the soldiers for defending liberty and justice.

"You are the acting arm of Quebec pacifism," Charest said. "You are liberators. The hour has come for the recognition of your courage." Samad stressed that the presence of NATO troops in his country is necessary to help rebuild.

"I ask all Canadians, including those who may have doubts about this mission, to take a look at the alternative," he said. "For millions of women and children and men, there is no alternative."

But as the military has ramped up its offensive to win the hearts and minds of the public, so have antiwar groups.

A few weeks ago, they mailed out 3,000 letters to homes around the military base in Valcartier, Que., a direct appeal to soldiers of the Royal 22nd Regiment to refuse deployment. On Friday, several hundred protesters took to the streets, chanting and waving banners. "Blood on our hands," read one banner.

"Support our troops. Bring them home," read another.

A survey released this week suggests 70 per cent of Quebecers were opposed to troops from CFB Valcartier going to Afghanistan.

The mission is the victim of both Quebec's sovereigntist aspirations and uncertainty over the success of the NATO action in Afghanistan. "We're protesting because 2,500 soldiers (including 2,000-odd Van Doos) will be leaving to participate in an unjust mission," said Schoen.

Let them protest, said the military.

"This is a democracy," said Dufour.

"Soldiers have laid down their lives on the front lines for democracy."

Canadian military medics share battlefield training in Lithuania

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 107

EDMONTON (CP) _ Six medics from Edmonton Garrison's 1 Field Ambulance are at a Lithuanian army base as part of a 1,700-strong training stint.

The two-week exercise called Amber Hope involves personnel from 10 NATO countries, who are sharing their battlefield skills to prepare for future missions.

Maj. John Crook, Canada's senior representative at Amber Hope, says he and his five colleagues at the exercise have all served in Afghanistan recently.

Crook says they bring hands-on experience providing life-saving treatment in combat conditions.

He says operations a few years ago tended more to the "mundane and routine," but now every medic knows that if the job isn't done absolutely right, soldiers could lose their lives.

Amber Hope on the shores of the Baltic Sea runs until June 30.

Afghan president says coalition forces ``careless" in killing of civilians

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 194

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) _ Afghan President Hamid Karzai is accusing NATO and U.S.-led forces of ``careless operations" in the deaths of more than 90 civilians and says international troops should place a higher value on Afghan lives.

Such operations ``will have no benefit for Afghanistan," Karzai said at a news conference Saturday.

``Several time in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," an angry-looking Karzai said in a mixture of English and his native Pashto.

Police said Friday that a NATO airstrike killed 25 civilians and 20 militants who had fired on NATO and Afghan troops from a walled compound in the southern province of Helmand.

NATO said the insurgents had hidden among civilians, causing innocent victims to be killed.

It added that troops had the right to defend themselves.

However, Karzai said the incident was an example of NATO troops using disproportionate force and that it exposed a ``serious lack of co-ordination with the Afghan government."

In all, he said 90 civilians have died in foreign-led operations in the past 10 days.

``We want to co-operate with the international community. We are thankful for their help to Afghanistan," Karzai said. ``But that does not mean that Afghan lives have no value.

``Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such."

Afghan Pakistan

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 93

FORWARD OPERATING BASE THUNDER, Afghanistan -- NATO says coalition forces in Afghanistan have killed about 60 insurgents along the border with Pakistan.

NATO says the insurgents fired on military aircraft, and NATO and U-S-led coalition forces returned fire.

Local officials in southern Afghanistan say a NATO airstrike that killed 20 militants also killed 25 civilians.

NATO accuses Taliban fighters of provoking the strike that reportedly killed the civilians, including three infants and nine women.

If confirmed, it would bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U-S-led military operations this year to 177.

An Associated Press tally is based on figures provided by Afghan officials and witnesses.

Militant attacks, including suicide bombings, have killed 169 civilians.

(AP)

ScH

TOR OUT YYY

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: ADVISORIES

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 265

A report says Liberal M-P Belinda Stronach has breast cancer.

The Toronto Star says Stronach, who is 41, was diagnosed a couple of months ago.

The paper says she's in an undisclosed Toronto-area hospital after undergoing a mastectomy and breast reconstruction last Tuesday.

The type of cancer she has is known as D-C-I-S, one of the more common and treatable forms of the disease.

Stronach's executive assistant says she was "upbeat and positive" when he spoke with her yesterday. (1)

(Mba Tornado) (Audio: 216)

The town of Elie (EE'-lie), Manitoba -- 35-kilometres west of Winnipeg -- has been hammered by an unconfirmed tornado that destroyed four homes.

The reported twister also damaged about four others homes, but caused no deaths or injuries.

A minivan near Elie was destroyed after it was picked up and tossed into a field a few hundred metres away.

Environment Canada is checking out reports that a total of three tornadoes touched down in southern Manitoba.

The other is west of Portage la Prairie, and the third is in the Carman area. (1)

(Afghan-Cda-Que)

Police in Quebec City report no trouble during a protest against the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan.

Two-thousand Quebec-based soldiers who will head to Afghanistan in a few weeks marched through the streets of Quebec City.

They were taunted by about 200 protesters, who say they're against the Afghan mission -- not the soldiers themselves. (1)

(Harper Afghanistan) (Audio: P5)

Prime Minister Harper says there's only one way Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will be extended past the current deadline of February, 2009.

Harper says there will have to be a consensus in Parliament.

The prime minister says he hopes Canadians don't want their soldiers to simply pack up and leave Afghanistan when the deadline arrives in 20 months. (1)

(Space Shuttle)

The space shuttle ``Atlantis" landed safely at Edward Air Force base in southern California.

Two days of bad weather at the primary landing site in Florida forced NASA to use the backup site.

It will cost NASA about 1.7 (m) million dollars to move the shuttle back to Florida atop a modified Boeing 7-47. (1)

(Europe Heat Wave)

A heat wave is blamed for at least 30 deaths across southeastern Europe.

The Greek capital of Athens reaches 40 Celsius yesterday, while the island of Rhodes got up to 45.

Romania, Serbia, and Albania are also hard hit by blistering temperatures. (1)

(NewsWatch by Bill Marshall)

INDEX:International, Defence, Politics

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 60

KABUL, Afghanistan – The U.S.–led coalition says one soldier is dead and two wounded during a clash in southern Afghanistan.

It says the soldier died this morning during combat operations near the village of Langar in Helmand Province.

Coalition forces came under small–arms and rocket–propelled grenade fire around 5:45 a.m. and immediately returned fire.

The nationalities of the soldiers, and the condition of those injured, has not been released.

(AP)

Afghan-Cda-Que

DATE: 2007.06.23
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE SOCIAL
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 123

QUEBEC — It had explosive potential — an anti-war protest in Quebec City that coincided with a military parade.

About 200 protesters chanting "Canada out of Afghanistan" marched side-by-side with soldiers last night as they paraded in fatigues.

Some tried to taunt the soldiers, but they were far outnumbered by supporters of the two-thousand Quebec-based troops who'll be heading to Kandahar in July.

The soldiers are members of the Royal 22nd Regiment — the famed Van Doos.

Premier Jean Charest, Afghan Ambassador Omar Samad and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor were among those who honoured the soldiers at a ceremony before the parade.

The military is trying hard to win over the public in Quebec where polling suggests 70 per cent are opposed to troops from C-F-B Valcartier going to Afghanistan.

The Afghan mission has so far claimed the lives of 60 Canadian soldiers and one Canadian diplomat.

(CP)

ScH

Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.06.23

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 134

KABUL, Afghanistan — NATO and U-S-led coalition forces say they've killed 60 insurgents near the border with Pakistan, in what they're describing as the largest insurgent formation in the region in six months.

The Pakistani army says a rocket fired during the battle hit a house inside its territory, killing nine civilians.

It also denies that any insurgents crossed into Afghanistan from Pakistan.

Faced with growing public anger over civilian casualties elsewhere at the hands of NATO and U-S-led forces, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said "careless operations" had killed more than 90 civilians in the last 10 days.

Police said yesterday that a NATO air strike in the southern province of Helmand had killed 25 civilians, as well as 20 militants who were firing on NATO and Afghan troops from a walled compound.

NATO said the insurgents caused the death of the innocent victims by hiding among them.

(AP)

RxH

Pakistani civilians die in clash

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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 207

Dozens of militants were killed in southern and eastern Afghanistan overnight in clashes with Western troops and Afghan forces, military officials said yesterday.

A foreign coalition soldier was also killed and two injured in Helmand province as days of sporadic clashes continued.

The dead and wounded soldiers have not been identified.

Coalition forces killed 60 insurgents near the border with Pakistan, in what was described by officials as the largest insurgent formation crossing the region in six months.

Pakistan's army said a rocket fired during the battle hit a house on its territory, killing civilians. It denied any insurgents had crossed the frontier.

A Pakistani military spokes– person, Maj.–Gen. Waheed Arshad, said international troops had fired rockets across the border overnight Friday and killed 10 civilians, including children.

Arshad said three or four houses were destroyed in the attack, and that 14 people were injured.

"We have protested about what happened," Arshad said.

"They were innocent people."

NATO forces spokesperson Maj. John Thomas acknowledged the Pakistani report and said the civilian death toll could end up being higher than 10.

Thomas said NATO and American forces were fighting insurgents along the Afghan–Pakistani border and that some of their firing was directed into the Pakistani side.

"It was a fluid situation," he said. "At some point, the activities did cross the border."

International troops operating in Afghanistan are not supposed to attack into Pakistan, though it has happened on numerous occasions.

Earlier this month, residents of a Pakistani border village reported seeing an aerial drone fire missiles in an attack that killed more than 30 people.

Star wire services

'Afghan life is not cheap'; Angry Karzai denounces spate of 'careless' killing of civilians by foreign forces in recent days

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PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
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PAGE: A10
ILLUSTRATION: FARZANA WAHIDY ap A visibly angry Afghan President Hamid Karzaichastises Western troops at a Kabul press conference yesterday. ;
BYLINE: Griff witte
SOURCE: Washington Post
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 487

Afghan President Hamid Karzai chastised Western troops yesterday for their "careless operations" and accused them of killing more than 90 civilians in the past 10 days, as fresh reports emerged of more non-combatant deaths.

Using some of his strongest language yet against the foreign forces that occupy his country, Karzai asserted that "Afghan life is not cheap, and it should not be treated as such."

"We do not want any more military operations without co-ordinating them with the Afghan government," a visibly angry Karzai said at a news conference in Kabul. "From now onwards, they have to work the way we ask them to work in here. "

It was unclear last night whether Karzai's statement indicated that he plans to formally restrict the operations of the approximately 53,000 Western troops, 2,500 of them Canadian, who patrol Afghanistan under either NATO command or a separate U.S.-led operation.

Karzai has the power to place limits on what these forces can do in his country, though any attempt to exert that control would probably produce a strong backlash from the countries that contribute troops to Afghanistan.

Karzai, a pro-Western leader who has generally welcomed international troops over the past five years, spoke after a series of incidents in recent days in which dozens of civilians have allegedly been killed in air strikes.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force, under which Canadian troops serve, responded contritely.

"President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesperson Nick Lunt said.

"We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Foreign commanders insist they take great care to avoid civilian deaths while trying to beat back the Taliban so that Karzai's frail government can deliver services to the impoverished south and east.

'Afghan life is not cheap'; Angry Karzai denounces spate of 'careless' killing of civilians by foreign forces in r

Both U.S. and NATO forces, however, rely heavily on devastating air power. That helps minimize foreign troop casualties while inflicting heavy losses on militants – but also regularly harms innocents.

"Every single ISAF commander knows and says that we can do our job here if we have the consent of the people. But unlike the Taliban, we do not set out to cause civilian casualties, and that is a critical difference," Lunt said.

Although Karzai also denounced the Taliban for killing civilians, he directed most of his anger at foreign forces.

Police said Friday that a NATO air strike in the southern province of Helmand had killed 25 civilians, along with 20 militants who were firing on NATO and Afghan troops from a walled compound. NATO blamed the insurgents for hiding among civilians and defended the right of its troops to defend themselves.

Last week, 52 civilians died when artillery was fired into Chora, a town in Uruzgan province where NATO troops fought the Taliban for three days.

"You do not fight terrorists by firing a field gun 20 miles (32 kilometres) into a target," Karzai said. "That is definitely, surely bound to cause civilian casualties."

The casualties listed by Karzai bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U.S.-led military operations this year to 211, according to an Associated Press tally of figures provided by Afghan and foreign officials. That tops the 172 civilians killed in militant attacks.

With files from Associated Press

A fashion statement isn't enough

IDNUMBER 200706240039
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
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WORD COUNT: 514

Canadian citizenship is about more than wearing a ribbon.

The great Toronto ribbon debate was the ultimate expression of image over substance and populism over conviction.

While ribbons and rubber wrist bands have been de rigueur fashion for the politically correct, most who wear them invest little more than a loonie or the risk of a pinprick as sacrifice to the colour-coded cause.

It is a little different when the city's first responders stick a ribbon decal on their vehicles. They live the same commitment as soldiers do to protect others. Police officers stand between us and harm. Firefighters walk into situations we are taught to flee, and few people are more engaged in dealing with unrelenting life-and-death crises than paramedics, who must possess a stamina I can't even imagine to do their jobs.

Police officers, firefighters, paramedics and, most of all, soldiers, represent the highest expression of citizenship and public service as they offer themselves as the price for its preservation.

We seem to take those freedoms for granted as we stumble out of bed each day and hop the subway to safe jobs in safe buildings without fearing a bomb will go off or a bullet will be fired at us.

The strength of a civil society, for which so many have given their lives, depends on the quality of its citizenship. Citizenship is about more than casting a vote or paying taxes. Citizens are more than passive consumers of events; they try to make a difference.

Elected officials are paid to pursue the public good on behalf of the citizens they represent, to advocate and speak out against injustice, and to mobilize the resources of their community to improve the quality of peoples' lives. All this in an effort to build a just society.

So little is asked of us today. We are the generation that inherited from our parents what is arguably the world's strongest economy and greatest democracy.

We are healthier and better educated; we live longer, enjoy more liberty and have at our fingertips greater technology and knowledge than any past generation.

This is our inheritance from a generation that faced war, depression, and who came to Canada fleeing genocide, oppression and holocaust to arrive on this young nation's soil in search of hope. From so little they left us so much. We should start to consider what our legacy will be.

Our sacrifice and commitment to the struggles of our world could be more than simply wearing a ribbon. Our city could partner with a city in Afghanistan to help restore local democracy and rebuild infrastructure.

We could lend the professional expertise and resources of this great and rich city to a community that can only dream of having the time to debate such things as ribbon decals on fire trucks.

Our mayor could convene business, labour, community and church leaders to reach out and help restore peace and civil society.

We could establish a refugee program for those Afghans whose lives are in peril, and welcome them to our city.

Our city could welcome our troops home in a public ceremony and establish support networks and help for the families of our soldiers.

We could support the efforts of our military personnel by sending resources to them to help them in their many community activities and the off-duty work they do with Afghan children.

All this would maybe justify a few of us civilians wearing a ribbon with the same pride and commitment of our first responders.

Glen Murray is a former Winnipeg mayor and urban strategist.

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Canada should steer clear of U.S. agenda

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BYLINE: Haroon Siddiqui
SOURCE: Toronto Star
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The United States is spending \$80 million to train and equip Mahmoud Abbas' Presidential Guard.

In Kabul, Hamid Karzai dare not move out of the cocoon of his elaborate American security. In Baghdad, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki must stay mostly in the American Green Zone.

That's not the only common thread in West Bank/Gaza, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The occupying powers are presiding over civil wars among terrorized peoples in collapsing societies run by militias, some funded directly or indirectly by the occupiers.

In Iraq and West Bank/Gaza, the people who could leave have. Those left behind survive on handouts of two kinds: banned but smuggled foreign funds subject to confiscation, or official aid subject to cancellation should the subjects misbehave, such as voting for Hamas.

In Afghanistan, people stave off hunger by cultivating opium crops, which are subject to erratic policies of eradication and tolerance.

Add to this the broader picture of American-Israeli alliances with such oligarchs as Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan and the sheikhs of oil kingdoms.

These "moderates" want peace with Israel (good) but they cannot deliver it (bad). So they must strike poses: holding summits, such as the one tomorrow by Mubarak, Abdullah and Abbas in Sharam el-Sheikh, and issuing rote proclamations about peace, which their media, and ours, record dutifully.

But the game has run its course.

In the Middle East and beyond, American embassies and consulates, with their bulletproof walls and barriers and bunkers and tanks, are today's Crusader forts.

In the zones of conflict, including Lebanon, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban and Iraqi Shiite and Sunni militias are empowered – as are their paymasters, Iran, Syria and official and private circles in Pakistan and the sheikhdoms.

People everywhere are radicalized. Terrorism is on the rise.

The most obvious way out of this crisis is to end the occupations, forge peace between Israel and the

Palestinians, and ditch the dictators and monarchs for democracy.

Israel and the United States are ostensibly committed to these goals. But they have a million excuses that they are being thwarted by indigenous forces of evil.

It is in this context that one must view the prospect of Tony Blair becoming the special envoy for the Quartet – the U.S., the UN, the E.U. and Russia – which was to bring about a two–state solution by 2005. The last envoy, James Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank, quit in frustration last year, blocked at every turn from easing the political, social and economic strangulation of Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip.

And the UN's envoy, Alvaro de Soto, has just been quoted as saying that his mission was "pummelled into submission" by the Americans. He has also accused the U.S. of actively pushing for a confrontation between Fatah and Hamas.

There are other reports as well of how the U.S.–funded Fatah security forces, led by Mohammed Dahlan, known as the Pinochet of Palestine, systematically sabotaged Hamas, especially the unity government forged in March, through murder and mayhem.

Rather than resisting this disastrous agenda, Canada is an active participant in it, thanks to Paul Martin and Stephen Harper. Had either been in power in 2003, we would have been plunged into Iraq as well.

Canadian public opinion has forced Harper to commit himself to ending our Afghan mission in February 2009, which NATO was hoping to extend.

Canadians, always eager to help rebuild, have been balking for good reason: They do not want our troops to be the cannon fodder for America's endless warfare.

Haroon Siddiqui is the Star's editorial page editor emeritus. His column appears Thursday and Sunday. He can be reached at [hsiddiq @ thestar.ca](mailto:hsiddiq@thestar.ca)

Harper finally able to read the writing on the wall

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Canada's Kandahar adventure is effectively finished. Canadian soldiers will continue to die in Afghanistan's south until the mission reaches its official end, 19 months from now. But even Prime Minister Stephen Harper has acknowledged that our efforts there can't be sustained.

The reasons are twofold and intertwined. First, NATO's war against Afghan insurgents is not succeeding. Second, there is not enough political support for that war here at home.

The New Democrats figured this out last year when they called for Canada to start withdrawing its forces from Kandahar immediately. The Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois belatedly joined them with calls to terminate the mission in early 2009. Now Harper and his Conservatives are signalling that they too can read the writing on the wall.

That's what Harper meant at his press conference on Friday when he said – twice – that he didn't want to extend the Kandahar mission past its current February 2009 end date unless there is a consensus in Parliament and the country to do so.

Barring some unforeseen circumstance, such as a Taliban attack on the CN Tower, there is not. Canadian soldiers may be gung-ho about risking their lives in Kandahar, but those who pay their wages are not.

This does not mean Canada will be out of Afghanistan altogether. The Liberals – and even the NDP in some of its statements – say Canada should continue to play an undefined role there. Harper too made reference to that on Friday.

But whatever that role is, it won't be the current one. Canadian troops won't be undertaking search and destroy combat missions in Kandahar. They probably won't be in Kandahar at all.

All of this will be welcome news for soldiers' families and friends. Compared to other wars, the casualties from Afghanistan are few. But they are consistent and inexorable – a roadside bomb here, a suicide attack there. Each one raises the fundamental question: What exactly are we doing in that country?

What indeed? The United States, Canada and other allies invaded Afghanistan in retaliation for the terror attacks of 9/11. Exactly why it made sense to overthrow the government of Afghanistan for an outrage perpetrated by Saudis and planned in Germany was never explained.

For a while, the ostensible aim of the war was to capture alleged terror mastermind Osama bin Laden and destroy his training camps. But after he escaped and the camps relocated to neighbouring Pakistan, that rationale was quietly dropped.

Then we were told we were fighting in Afghanistan to destroy terrorists there before they attacked us here. But as the citizens of London and Madrid discovered, war is not so easily contained by geography.

Perversely, the war on terror abroad made us less safe at home.

So now our rationale is that we are trying to help the Afghans. Which is a noble cause. Yet polls tell us that a great many Afghans no longer trust or want us. They are sick of having their homes bombed and their fields shelled. They may not like the Taliban, but they don't like us either.

It's hard to blame them. According to Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, U.S. and NATO forces are responsible for about 60 per cent of the civilian deaths in this war.

So perhaps it's best for everyone that Canadian public opinion will no longer let the Kandahar mission continue.

We have 19 months to figure out what, if anything, we can usefully do in Afghanistan after Kandahar. Until then, Canadian soldiers will continue to die.

Thomas Walkom's column appears Thursday and Sunday.

A fashion statement isn't enough

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PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.06.24
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A15
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 514

Canadian citizenship is about more than wearing a ribbon.

The great Toronto ribbon debate was the ultimate expression of image over substance and populism over conviction.

While ribbons and rubber wrist bands have been de rigueur fashion for the politically correct, most who wear them invest little more than a loonie or the risk of a pinprick as sacrifice to the colour-coded cause.

It is a little different when the city's first responders stick a ribbon decal on their vehicles. They live the same commitment as soldiers do to protect others. Police officers stand between us and harm. Firefighters walk into situations we are taught to flee, and few people are more engaged in dealing with unrelenting life-and-death crises than paramedics, who must possess a stamina I can't even imagine to do their jobs.

Police officers, firefighters, paramedics and, most of all, soldiers, represent the highest expression of citizenship and public service as they offer themselves as the price for its preservation.

We seem to take those freedoms for granted as we stumble out of bed each day and hop the subway to safe jobs in safe buildings without fearing a bomb will go off or a bullet will be fired at us.

The strength of a civil society, for which so many have given their lives, depends on the quality of its citizenship. Citizenship is about more than casting a vote or paying taxes. Citizens are more than passive consumers of events; they try to make a difference.

Elected officials are paid to pursue the public good on behalf of the citizens they represent, to advocate and speak out against injustice, and to mobilize the resources of their community to improve the quality of peoples' lives. All this in an effort to build a just society.

So little is asked of us today. We are the generation that inherited from our parents what is arguably the world's strongest economy and greatest democracy.

We are healthier and better educated; we live longer, enjoy more liberty and have at our fingertips greater technology and knowledge than any past generation.

This is our inheritance from a generation that faced war, depression, and who came to Canada fleeing genocide, oppression and holocaust to arrive on this young nation's soil in search of hope. From so little they left us so much. We should start to consider what our legacy will be.

Our sacrifice and commitment to the struggles of our world could be more than simply wearing a ribbon. Our city could partner with a city in Afghanistan to help restore local democracy and rebuild infrastructure.

We could lend the professional expertise and resources of this great and rich city to a community that can only dream of having the time to debate such things as ribbon decals on fire trucks.

Our mayor could convene business, labour, community and church leaders to reach out and help restore peace and civil society.

We could establish a refugee program for those Afghans whose lives are in peril, and welcome them to our city.

Our city could welcome our troops home in a public ceremony and establish support networks and help for the families of our soldiers.

We could support the efforts of our military personnel by sending resources to them to help them in their many community activities and the off-duty work they do with Afghan children.

All this would maybe justify a few of us civilians wearing a ribbon with the same pride and commitment of our first responders.

Glen Murray is a former Winnipeg mayor and urban strategist.

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Canada should steer clear of U.S. agenda

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PAGE: A15
BYLINE: Haroon Siddiqui
SOURCE: Toronto Star
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WORD COUNT: 534

The United States is spending \$80 million to train and equip Mahmoud Abbas' Presidential Guard.

In Kabul, Hamid Karzai dare not move out of the cocoon of his elaborate American security. In Baghdad, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki must stay mostly in the American Green Zone.

That's not the only common thread in West Bank/Gaza, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The occupying powers are presiding over civil wars among terrorized peoples in collapsing societies run by militias, some funded directly or indirectly by the occupiers.

In Iraq and West Bank/Gaza, the people who could leave have. Those left behind survive on handouts of two kinds: banned but smuggled foreign funds subject to confiscation, or official aid subject to cancellation should the subjects misbehave, such as voting for Hamas.

In Afghanistan, people stave off hunger by cultivating opium crops, which are subject to erratic policies of eradication and tolerance.

Add to this the broader picture of American-Israeli alliances with such oligarchs as Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan and the sheikhs of oil kingdoms.

These "moderates" want peace with Israel (good) but they cannot deliver it (bad). So they must strike poses: holding summits, such as the one tomorrow by Mubarak, Abdullah and Abbas in Sharam el-Sheikh, and issuing rote proclamations about peace, which their media, and ours, record dutifully.

But the game has run its course.

In the Middle East and beyond, American embassies and consulates, with their bulletproof walls and barriers and bunkers and tanks, are today's Crusader forts.

In the zones of conflict, including Lebanon, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban and Iraqi Shiite and Sunni militias are empowered – as are their paymasters, Iran, Syria and official and private circles in Pakistan and the sheikhdoms.

People everywhere are radicalized. Terrorism is on the rise.

The most obvious way out of this crisis is to end the occupations, forge peace between Israel and the

Palestinians, and ditch the dictators and monarchs for democracy.

Israel and the United States are ostensibly committed to these goals. But they have a million excuses that they are being thwarted by indigenous forces of evil.

It is in this context that one must view the prospect of Tony Blair becoming the special envoy for the Quartet – the U.S., the UN, the E.U. and Russia – which was to bring about a two–state solution by 2005. The last envoy, James Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank, quit in frustration last year, blocked at every turn from easing the political, social and economic strangulation of Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip.

And the UN's envoy, Alvaro de Soto, has just been quoted as saying that his mission was "pummelled into submission" by the Americans. He has also accused the U.S. of actively pushing for a confrontation between Fatah and Hamas.

There are other reports as well of how the U.S.–funded Fatah security forces, led by Mohammed Dahlan, known as the Pinochet of Palestine, systematically sabotaged Hamas, especially the unity government forged in March, through murder and mayhem.

Rather than resisting this disastrous agenda, Canada is an active participant in it, thanks to Paul Martin and Stephen Harper. Had either been in power in 2003, we would have been plunged into Iraq as well.

Canadian public opinion has forced Harper to commit himself to ending our Afghan mission in February 2009, which NATO was hoping to extend.

Canadians, always eager to help rebuild, have been balking for good reason: They do not want our troops to be the cannon fodder for America's endless warfare.

Haroon Siddiqui is the Star's editorial page editor emeritus. His column appears Thursday and Sunday. He can be reached at [hsiddiq @ thestar.ca](mailto:hsiddiq@thestar.ca)

Battle for public opinion Desire to have troops withdraw from combat in Afghanistan growing, polls show

SOURCETAG 0706240023

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DATE: 2007.06.24

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PAGE: 13

BYLINE: GREG WESTON

WORD COUNT: 666

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On the same day the Commons faded to black for the summer recess, the Afghan conflict delivered another three deaths and a funeral, four more Canadian soldiers tragically felled in their prime, more families racked by horror and heartbreak.

And once again, public opinion has been shaken by the deaths of native sons in a war already bleeding support among Canadians of all ages and in all regions.

While the degree of progress being made by the Canadian forces and their NATO allies in Kandahar remains a matter of contention, there seems little question the Conservative government is losing ground on the public relations front here at home.

Recent public opinion polls conducted by SES Research for Sun Media suggest Canadians in the majority have low expectations of achieving great things in Afghanistan, a high intolerance for body bags, and a growing desire to see our troops withdraw from combat duty by early 2009 as scheduled.

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"For most Canadians, it is really starting to sink in that Canada's objectives may not be achievable, so why are we making the ultimate sacrifices there?"

ANTI-WAR

For the first time, anti-war sentiments are making their way into the mainstream — this week's big kerfuffle over the yellow-ribbon stickers on Toronto emergency vehicles, the dust-up in the Quebec legislature when some PQ members refused to join a standing ovation for soldiers in the visitors' gallery.

How public opinion turned south on Afghanistan is obviously a complex matrix of factors, not the least of which has been an abysmal failure of government communications. Think about it: What are the most enduring images of Afghanistan that come to mind? A picture of humanitarian aid? Of reconstruction projects? Of social development? Of happy Afghans going about their daily business in peace?

More likely, it is something like the well-worn loop of network tape that routinely punctuates nightly newscasts, a clip showing a handful of Canadian soldiers firing their guns over a dirt wall at an unseen enemy.

On a recent surprise visit of Stephen Harper to Afghanistan, news organizations were officially invited to pay a small fortune to send reporters and camera crews, only to be corralled away from everything but a canned speech by the PM.

It wasn't an issue of safety or security — the Canadian military had gladly planned trips, interviews and other events for reporters, but everything was cancelled.

It has been the same from the beginning. Rather than aggressively using the media to help frame the Afghan mission as a difficult humanitarian effort in a dangerous environment, Harper's failed spin machine has allowed the conflict to be framed by deaths, official snafus and other negative events.

Public relations disasters simply don't get much worse than the cock-up over Afghan detainees, or a fallen soldier's parents publicly begging the government for money to bury their son.

GRUDGE

Whether the government can reverse the tide of public opinion on Afghanistan is a matter of some doubt, in part because the PM and his pointless grudge-match with the media are part of the problem.

In the event the light comes on and Harper does buy into a change in communications strategy over the coming months, a good start would be giving the boot to the cantankerous Gordon O'Connor as defence minister, and perhaps replacing the affable Peter MacKay at foreign affairs with someone of greater perceived gravitas.

One thing seems certain: The situation in Afghanistan is only going to become more of a political quagmire in the months ahead.

The deployment of the Royal 22nd Regiment from Quebec this summer, for instance, is bound to stir sentiments in a province that is already the country's biggest hotbed of anti-war dissent.

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DATE: 2007.06.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Comment
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ILLUSTRATION: drawing by Sue Dewar
BYLINE: GREG WESTON
COLUMN: National Affairs
WORD COUNT: 666

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Our troops deserve better Some people who say they support our forces are lying

SOURCETAG 0706240332

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.06.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: Comment

PAGE: C3

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Ernest Doroszuk, Sun Media Injured Afghanistan veteran Jody Mitic hands out Support Our Troops ribbons in the Toronto Sun lobby last Friday, where hundreds of citizens lined up to express their support for our soldiers serving everywhere around the world .

BYLINE: LORRIE GOLDSTEIN, TORONTO SUN

WORD COUNT: 541

During last week's blow-up at Toronto City Hall, it was fascinating to watch many so-called "anti-war" types claim they "support our troops, but not the war," in reference to our military mission in Afghanistan.

After all, if they truly support our troops, why are they offended by a little sticker that says ... "Support Our Troops"?

One could understand if it said "Support The War" but "Support Our Troops"? C'mon.

In reality, we all know the answer to this apparent contradiction.

It's that some people who claim they "support our troops but not the war" are lying through their teeth.

In fact, they don't support our troops, or even think about them very much.

But they are fanatically opposed to any public displays of support or affection not just for our soldiers, but for all things military — stickers, rallies, parades, concerts, Red Fridays and similar events.

In the minds of these "anti-war" types (a misnomer since no sane person is "pro-war") these are all misguided examples of "patriotism," which leads to imperialism.

While they claim to "support our troops" they typically mention this only in passing before getting to their real passion, which is denouncing any armed conflict in which Canadians (and Americans) are involved.

(Non-western nations who invade other countries or attack their own civilians are, of course, almost always given a free pass.)

Next comes their obligatory lament for the loss of Canada's reputation as a "peacekeeping nation," revealing either their fundamental ignorance or, more probably, their willingness to distort our history and proud military/warrior tradition, of which peacekeeping is only one component.

(Ironically, well-trained warriors, meaning soldiers, are highly-effective peacekeepers, which is why Canadian soldiers are so good at it. But as we have seen with many examples of modern UN peacekeeping, soldiers untrained in the warrior traditions of battlefield competence and discipline, make lousy

peacekeepers.)

Another tactic of "anti-war" types is to argue that those who promote "Support Our Troops" decals and the like are flying under a false flag. That what they are really trying to do is shut down political debate about our mission in Afghanistan by using Canadians' natural support for our soldiers as a bludgeon to silence dissent.

LIP SERVICE

There is some truth to this, but it pales beside the false flag many "anti-war" types operate under. What they are really doing in paying mere lip service to "supporting our troops," is arguing against any actual displays of that support. They want to implant the idea that since "supporting our troops" is a given, there's no need to ever do it.

Yet another tactic is to claim while they are not personally offended by public displays of support for our troops, unnamed "others" are.

To be sure, many Canadians — given current polls on Afghanistan, probably most — sincerely support our troops while opposing this mission.

But they are not the people offended by "Support Our Troops" campaigns, precisely because their support for our soldiers is genuine, while they also question why so many fine young Canadians are dying half a world away in a dangerous and at times seemingly impossible mission.

But that's not what the "anti-war" types we have been discussing here are all about.

They have another agenda — to silence public displays of support for our soldiers not because they "support" them (a logical absurdity) but because they want to demoralize them and to have that demoralization blow back into Canada, in order to create more political pressure to end the Afghanistan mission.

In reality, the strongest argument these "anti-war" types had last week, was to ask why Toronto council, through the Support Our Troops decals, was getting involved in a federal issue.

But given the long history of the "anti-war"/political left at city hall wanting municipal government to get involved in causes that have nothing to do with local issues, that argument would have been laughed out of the council chamber. Thus it was seldom mentioned.

Battle for public opinion Desire to have troops withdraw from combat in Afghanistan growing, polls show

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.06.24

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SECTION: Comment

PAGE: 27

BYLINE: GREG WESTON

WORD COUNT: 666

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Karzai decries civilian deaths 'Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such.'

SOURCETAG 0706240209

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.06.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A9

ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI Western-backed Afghan president calls on NATO and U.S.-led troops to use restraint.

BYLINE: JASON STRAZIUSO, AP

DATELINE: KABUL

WORD COUNT: 480

President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.-led troops yesterday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians and warned that the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better."

In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said. The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western-backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

"Several times in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," Karzai said at a news conference in his Kabul palace.

The casualties listed by Karzai bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U.S.-led military operations this year to 211, according to an Associated Press tally of figures provided by Afghan and foreign officials and witnesses.

That tops the 172 civilians killed in militant attacks.

"If NATO forces want to be successful in their fight against terrorism and in bringing security to Afghanistan, they should co-ordinate with the Afghan government, no matter if the operation is small or big," Karzai said in a mixture of English and his native Pashto.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force responded contritely.

"President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesperson Nick Lunt said. "We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Foreign commanders insist they take great care to avoid civilian deaths while trying to beat back the Taliban so that Karzai's frail government can deliver services to the impoverished south and east.

Both U.S. and NATO forces, however, rely heavily on devastating air power. That helps minimize foreign troop casualties while inflicting heavy losses on militants — but also regularly harms innocents.

"Unlike the Taliban, we do not set out to cause civilian casualties, and that is a critical difference," Lunt said.

Earlier yesterday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.-led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

NATO said militants attacked Afghan and alliance troops late Friday in Paktika province. The alliance said it was the largest insurgent formation seen in the area since January, when U.S. forces said they had killed around 130 of 180 militants crossing from Pakistan. Pakistan denied any insurgents had cross the frontier.

Extra troops have been deployed on both sides of the mountainous frontier in an attempt to prevent militants who find sanctuary in Pakistan's wild tribal regions from mounting crossborder raids and sustaining the five-year-old war.

Although Karzai also denounced the Taliban for killing civilians, he directed most of his anger at foreign forces.

Police said Friday that a NATO air strike in Helmand had killed 25 civilians, along with 20 militants who were firing on troops from a walled compound. NATO blamed the insurgents for hiding among civilians and defended the right to defend themselves. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Local military families battling LACK OF HOUSING

SOURCETAG 0706240678

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.06.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: M5

ILLUSTRATION: file photo Canadian military families are finding little vacancies in Edmonton.

BYLINE: CP

DATELINE: EDMONTON

TYPE : Supplement

WORD COUNT: 543

Space has become tight at Carrie Levesque's home. In her two-bedroom bungalow, the 29-year-old wife of a Canadian soldier manages to run a four-child day home while looking after two young daughters of her own.

"We can't do this for much longer," Levesque said from her home in Legal, a town about 30 minutes north of Edmonton. "We need a bigger house."

"My daughter (Brandee) needs her own privacy."

Her children, aged five and eight, share a bedroom.

Yet for all her complaints, Levesque and her husband, who has served twice in Afghanistan, know they have little choice of where to live. Houses in Edmonton and even in its suburbs are too expensive, and they find the military's own housing, known as Private Married Quarters, or PMQs, unsuitable.

"The PMQs are horrible," said Levesque, who lived in one for the first two years of her husband's posting, which started in 2002.

"They're old, the plumbing sucks, the sewer comes up, the windows are old."

Levesque's story is increasingly common among Edmonton's military families, who have seen the number of available PMQs drop while private-market house prices leap with Alberta's energy-fuelled economic boom.

About one-fifth of the approximately 4,500 soldiers stationed at Edmonton Garrison live in military housing. PMQ vacancy is zero per cent at the moment, with about 200 families on the waiting list – four times as many as there were six months ago, according to the Canadian Forces Housing Agency.

Other families try their luck renting or buying homes in the city or search for better deals in outlying communities such as Morinville, just south of Legal.

According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, the average price of a residential home in Edmonton rose 25% in 2006 and hit \$330,000 in May this year. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation predicts rents in Edmonton will soar by 20% this year and that a typical two-bedroom apartment will be renting for \$1,115 a month in 2008. The Edmonton rental vacancy rate for 2007 is expected to sag around 0.7%.

One family that was to be deployed to Edmonton this summer was scared so much by the prospects of house hunting in the Alberta capital that they asked to be redeployed. Their posting was recently switched to Winnipeg.

Although no other families have asked to be redeployed, the military concedes that families have expressed increasing concern about housing in Edmonton.

"We're looking into it," said military spokesman Lt.-Col. Pierre Babinsky in Ottawa.

Edmonton Garrison runs about 500 PMQs just north of the city. Although there are no plans to build more in Edmonton itself, the Canada Lands Corporation has agreed to let the military hold onto 69 units at the former site of CFB Griesbach, an area of north Edmonton that is being converted into a civilian residential neighbourhood.

Babinsky said the military is also reviewing the post living differential, a supplement given to families to offset high living costs. Edmonton does not currently qualify for the supplement, and Babinsky could not say if the city is being considered in the review.

Babinsky said families who are concerned about finding housing in Edmonton can ask to be redeployed, but "obviously the needs of the service prevail."

One military source who asked not to be named said the concern about finding housing in Edmonton has mystified Canadian Forces officials. The source said housing officials at Edmonton Garrison surveyed the rental market recently and found approximately 4,200 available units, although he couldn't provide details about the type of units.

"So what's the hype?" he asked.

Levesque, who supplements her husband's \$55,000 military salary with about \$2,000 a month from the day home, said her family doesn't have enough money to move at the moment.

She said she's hoping her husband will get a raise soon, or that the family can get posted to a city with cheaper housing.

For the time being, she's telling her daughters to be patient.

"I tell them, 'At least we've got a room over our heads.'"

Canuck medics share skills with NATO soldiers

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BYLINE: CP
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Six Canadian army medics are bringing their hands-on experience in Afghanistan to a military training exercise on the edge of the Baltic Sea where 1,700 NATO troops are sharing their battlefield skills.

The two-week training operation at the Lithuanian army base of Klaipeda is called Amber Hope. It involves personnel from 10 NATO countries, including Canada, Germany, Poland, Finland and the United States.

Maj. John Crook, Canada's senior representative at the exercise, says he and his five colleagues from 1 Field Ambulance at Edmonton Garrison, all served in Afghanistan recently.

Crook says that kind of experience brings real-life grit to training that just a few years ago was much more theoretical.

"The med techs have experienced some pretty harrowing experiences last year providing care under fire," Crook said yesterday from Klaipeda.

"They bring that perspective to the soldiers, now that everything you do you have to do it with care ... and you have to look after yourself and your buddy, because if you don't, bad things will happen."

Crook said training has always been emphasized in the military, but it's taken on a more serious note since Canadian soldiers started dying in Afghanistan.

"The operations used to be rather mundane and routine. They're not that way anymore. We're actually taking casualties. We're taking fatalities," he said.

"It's no joke. People die out there, people get injured out there if you do the wrong thing, so everything has to be done very carefully and planned very carefully.

Canada's military medics at this year's exercise have been attached to a battalion from the United Kingdom as it practises its military manoeuvres. Their job is twofold: to provide medical attention if needed to participants and to be part of any first-aid and CPR refresher training. **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

Karzai outraged over civilians' deaths Afghan prez blames NATO and U.S.-led troops

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ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI 'Life not cheap'
BYLINE: JASON STRAZIUSO, AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 362

President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.-led troops yesterday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians.

He also warned that the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

ANGRY REBUKE

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better."

In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said.

The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western-backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

"Several times in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," Karzai said at a news conference in his Kabul palace.

The casualties listed by Karzai bring the number of civilians killed in NATO or U.S.-led military operations this year to 211, according to an Associated Press tally of figures provided by Afghan and foreign officials and witnesses.

That tops the 172 civilians killed in militant attacks.

"If NATO forces want to be successful in their fight against terrorism and in bringing security to Afghanistan, they should co-ordinate with the Afghan government, no matter if the operation is small or big," Karzai said in a mixture of English and his native Pashto.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force responded contritely.

"President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesman Nick Lunt said. "We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Foreign commanders insist they take great care to avoid civilian deaths while trying to beat back the Taliban so that Karzai's frail government can deliver services to the impoverished south and east.

Both U.S. and NATO forces, however, rely heavily on devastating air power. That helps minimize foreign troop casualties while inflicting heavy losses on militants – but also regularly harms innocents.

"Every single ISAF commander knows and says that we can do our job here if we have the consent of the people. But unlike the Taliban, we do not set out to cause civilian casualties, and that is a critical difference," Lunt said.

ROCKET HITS HOUSE

Earlier yesterday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.–led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

NATO said militants attacked Afghan and alliance troops late Friday in Paktika province.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Battle for public opinion Desire to have troops withdraw from combat in Afghanistan growing, polls show

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BYLINE: GREG WESTON

WORD COUNT: 666

As the sun set on another session of Parliament this week, the war in Afghanistan cast its long shadow across the nation's political landscape.

On the same day the Commons faded to black for the summer recess, the Afghan conflict delivered another three deaths and a funeral, four more Canadian soldiers tragically felled in their prime, more families racked by horror and heartbreak.

And once again, public opinion has been shaken by the deaths of native sons in a war already bleeding support among Canadians of all ages and in all regions.

While the degree of progress being made by the Canadian forces and their NATO allies in Kandahar remains a matter of contention, there seems little question the Conservative government is losing ground on the public relations front here at home.

Recent public opinion polls conducted by SES Research for Sun Media suggest Canadians in the majority have low expectations of achieving great things in Afghanistan, a high intolerance for body bags, and a growing desire to see our troops withdraw from combat duty by early 2009 as scheduled.

SES pollster Nik Nanos concludes that "Afghanistan has become a political quagmire for Stephen Harper; there is no easy way out.

"For most Canadians, it is really starting to sink in that Canada's objectives may not be achievable, so why are we making the ultimate sacrifices there?"

ANTI-WAR

For the first time, anti-war sentiments are making their way into the mainstream — this week's big kerfuffle over the yellow-ribbon stickers on Toronto emergency vehicles, the dust-up in the Quebec legislature when some PQ members refused to join a standing ovation for soldiers in the visitors' gallery.

How public opinion turned south on Afghanistan is obviously a complex matrix of factors, not the least of which has been an abysmal failure of government communications. Think about it: What are the most enduring images of Afghanistan that come to mind? A picture of humanitarian aid? Of reconstruction projects? Of social development? Of happy Afghans going about their daily business in peace?

More likely, it is something like the well-worn loop of network tape that routinely punctuates nightly newscasts, a clip showing a handful of Canadian soldiers firing their guns over a dirt wall at an unseen enemy.

On a recent surprise visit of Stephen Harper to Afghanistan, news organizations were officially invited to pay a small fortune to send reporters and camera crews, only to be corralled away from everything but a canned speech by the PM.

It wasn't an issue of safety or security — the Canadian military had gladly planned trips, interviews and other events for reporters, but everything was cancelled.

It has been the same from the beginning. Rather than aggressively using the media to help frame the Afghan mission as a difficult humanitarian effort in a dangerous environment, Harper's failed spin machine has allowed the conflict to be framed by deaths, official snafus and other negative events.

Public relations disasters simply don't get much worse than the cock-up over Afghan detainees, or a fallen soldier's parents publicly begging the government for money to bury their son.

GRUDGE

Whether the government can reverse the tide of public opinion on Afghanistan is a matter of some doubt, in part because the PM and his pointless grudge-match with the media are part of the problem.

In the event the light comes on and Harper does buy into a change in communications strategy over the coming months, a good start would be giving the boot to the cantankerous Gordon O'Connor as defence minister, and perhaps replacing the affable Peter MacKay at foreign affairs with someone of greater perceived gravitas.

One thing seems certain: The situation in Afghanistan is only going to become more of a political quagmire in the months ahead.

The deployment of the Royal 22nd Regiment from Quebec this summer, for instance, is bound to stir sentiments in a province that is already the country's biggest hotbed of anti-war dissent.

At the same time, the Taliban are warning that the 35 people killed in this week's suicide bombing in Kabul is a harbinger of a broader plan to turn the Afghan capital into the next Baghdad.

Then there are the Canadian casualties.

In a chilling interview with the BBC this week, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahed said his forces have one main objective: Killing NATO soldiers.

"We are certain we will win, because for us independence is important. For the NATO forces, the lives of their soldiers are important. There will be a big fuss in the Western parliaments, asking that their sons should not be killed in Afghanistan.

"This means we will defeat them."

Battle for public opinion Desire to have troops withdraw from combat in Afghanistan growing, polls show

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

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BYLINE: GREG WESTON

WORD COUNT: 666

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Karzai blasts 'careless' killing NATO troops draw Afghan president's wrath

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ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI Angry words
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 245

President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.-led troops yesterday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians.

He warned the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better."

In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said.

The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western-backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

"Several times in the last year, the Afghan government tried to prevent civilian casualties, but our innocent people are becoming victims of careless operations of NATO and international forces," Karzai said.

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NATO's International Security Assistance Force responded contritely.

"President Karzai has a right to be disappointed and angry over the scale of civilian casualties in the last few days," ISAF spokesman Nick Lunt said. "We need to do better than we have been doing so far."

Earlier yesterday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.-led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

Other fighting left 20 militants and one coalition soldier dead. The soldier, who died in a firefight in the southern province of Helmand, was not identified. KEYWORDS=WORLD

'Afghan life is not cheap': Karzai Criticizes NATO, U.S. over civilian deaths

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DATE: 2007.06.24

PAGE: A11

SECTION: World Wire

WORD COUNT: 504

CP Wire Jason Straziuso KABUL — Afghan President Hamid Karzai accused NATO and U.S.–led troops Saturday of carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians and warned that the fight against resurgent Taliban militants could fail unless foreign forces show more restraint.

"Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such," Karzai said in an angry rebuke that drew a contrite acknowledgment from NATO that it must "do better." In the past 10 days, more than 90 civilians have been killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting Taliban insurgents, Karzai said. The mounting toll is sapping the authority of the Western–backed Afghan president, who has pleaded repeatedly with U.S. and NATO commanders to consult Afghan authorities during operations and show more restraint.

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Earlier Saturday, Pakistan said a rocket hit a house in its territory, killing nine civilians during a battle in which NATO and U.S.–led forces killed some 60 suspected Taliban near Afghanistan's eastern border.

NATO said militants attacked Afghan and alliance troops late Friday in Paktika province. The alliance said it was the largest insurgent formation seen in the area since January, when U.S. forces said they had killed around 130 of 180 militants crossing from Pakistan.

Pakistan denied any insurgents had crossed the frontier.

Extra troops have been deployed on both sides of the mountainous frontier in an attempt to prevent militants who find sanctuary in Pakistan's wild tribal regions from mounting cross-border raids and sustaining the five-year-old war.

— Associated Press

The fight of their lives Surrounded by Taliban, cut off from reinforcements, Alpha Company earned its honours

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PAGE: A10

SECTION: City

WORD COUNT: 1352

Lindsey Wiebe A group of 126 Shilo-based soldiers arrived in Afghanistan last summer for a six-month tour of duty. Within days, they were in an intense battle with Taliban forces that tested their limits as soldiers, and earned eight of them honours from the Governor General, announced this spring and set to be handed out at a later date. Seven of the soldiers recently sat down with the Free Press to share their story.

By Lindsey Wiebe Maj. Michael Wright and the soldiers of Alpha Company knew they were heading into violent territory when they landed last August in Kandahar province.

But the Shilo-based group couldn't have expected that the defining moment of their tour — a three-hour battle with the Taliban that would earn some of them national recognition — would come just a week later.

The 126 soldiers had barely settled into their compound in the province's Zhari District when they received orders to occupy the Masum Ghar mountain in the volatile Panjwaii District. Four Canadian soldiers had been killed there just two weeks before.

The orders came Aug. 19, which happened to be Afghan Independence Day. So while Afghans around the country celebrated, and President Hamid Karzai delivered an official speech, the soldiers at A Company were planning out the battle ahead.

The group had watched increasingly intense mortar fire attacks on Masum Ghar since they arrived, said Wright.

That night, working with Afghan's national army and police units, they moved in on the mountain — and faced problems almost immediately.

Initially they could hear the Afghan National Army firing towards the south. This didn't make sense, said Wright, since they'd expected attacks from the north.

The group also found there wasn't enough room on the north side of the mountain for two light armoured vehicles, or LAVs.

And that meant Capt. Michael Reekie had to lead a team to the vulnerable south side of the mountain, which faced a region of dense grape fields, perfect terrain for militants trying to stay hidden.

"It's not like Niagara on the Lake, where you have nice cultivated grapes growing up on wooden stakes," said Wright.

These grapes grow along mud walls that range between three and six feet tall, perfect for a Taliban ambush.

The fight of their lives Surrounded by Taliban, cut off from reinforcements, Alpha Company earned its honours

It's a style of fighting where the enemy is largely hidden — "essentially, a hit and run tactic," said Sgt. Dan Holley — and the group had already fallen victim to a few ambushes during their short time in Afghanistan.

On the north side of the mountain, Wright was sitting outside his LAV to write up orders when a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at the vehicle — from a post he'd just been told was occupied by friendly forces.

"That's when we knew that something was starting up," he said.

Meanwhile, Reekie and his team in the south-side LAV were under attack by Taliban fighters, engaging in what Wright described as 360-degree fighting, dealing with waves of attacks on all sides from a much larger Taliban group.

Reekie described the experience as "lines of guys running at us with guns and rocket propelled grenades." The Taliban would come in groups of half a dozen or more, he said, some only 10 metres away from the vehicle.

Media reports pegged the number of Taliban troops at 72, but later estimates were as high as 200, said Wright.

Reekie's group was clearly outnumbered, but because of the darkness and road conditions, they were advised not to call for reinforcements.

That left the small group to face their attackers alone. Corporals William Elliott and Nigel Gregg worked as riflemen, trading off at the back hatches, and Pte. Timmy Dean Wilkins was the machine gunner.

Sgt. Holley operated in the turret with Reekie, and Cpl. Chad Chevrefils navigated the difficult roads as driver.

Chevrefils faced another unexpected challenge — the viewing aid in the LAV used to size up the terrain wasn't working. To compensate, the Pine Falls native had to pop the hatch and rely on a pair of night-vision goggles, leaving himself open to gunfire.

"He was more or less driving blind," said Wright.

Looking back, Chevrefil was able to joke. "The fresh air felt nice," he said.

Once the fighting began, said Reekie, there wasn't much time to think about the risks involved. Instead, the group went into training mode.

"I would say the events very much kind of took over... it was pretty much a fight to survive," said Reekie.

While an ambush might last only a few minutes, this battle lasted for three hours, before the team withdrew to the other side of Masum Ghar, in an attempt to link up with an Afghan National Army group.

Then, with darkness around them, a new disaster hit — an LAV slipped off the rough dirt road and ended up on its side. Soldiers in the LAV had to get the vehicle upright while fending off another ambush.

A Company came through the night without a single fatality. But the seriousness of the battle hit home the next day, when they saw the bodies of Taliban fighters lying around the area.

"At that point we kind of realized the significance," said Reekie.

In the days following the battle, there was little time to reflect.

The fight of their lives Surrounded by Taliban, cut off from reinforcements, Alpha Company earned 68s honou

Within 48 hours the troops were involved in another ambush. Three days later, they lost another soldier, Cpl. David Braun, to a suicide attack.

z z z Looking back now, the soldiers think of the three-hour battle with a mixture of gratitude and incredulity.

"It was the highest point that you could ever feel and the lowest point that you could ever feel at the same time," said Elliott, "where you had the rush of adrenaline of actually engaging and doing your job, and the scaredness of not walking away." "I thank (expletive) I'm sitting here right now," said Gregg bluntly.

"You just remain as vigilant as you can be and stay as safe as you can be, and keep your pals (expletive) alive. And here we are, shooting the sh**." Wilkins, who worked in another trade before the military, said 12 years on the job couldn't compete with the knowledge he gained in a single battle.

"In all that time, I don't think I've ever learned as much as I did that night," he said.

The Aug. 19 battle was one of many in an ongoing war, and the group knows their knowledge is dated now, months after they wrapped up their tour and returned to Canada.

But the group could see increased security in Masum Ghar by the end of the tour, said Wright, and feel that the August battle in particular helped set the stage for last September's Operation Medusa, a Canada-led NATO mission to force the Taliban out of the Panjwahi district.

Wright, Reekie and Chevrefils all received Medals of Military Valour for their conduct in the battle, while Mention-in-Dispatches honours were given to Elliott, Gregg, Holley, and Wilkins, as well as Sgt. Vince Adams, who helped right the overturned LAV.

Receiving the recognition was a welcome honour, said the group, but it's not foremost on their mind.

"I feel I was just doing my job," said Gregg. "I don't feel I need anything for it, not even a thank you." "Everyone fought hard to keep each other alive," said Reekie.

"I think that we take more pride in that than we do in any medal." lindsey.wiebe@freepress.mb.ca What they did...

MEDAL OF MILITARY VALOUR z Major Michael Wright, M.M.V., C.D.

"Under intense fire from small arms and rocket-propelled grenades coming from all directions, he refused reinforcements for safety reasons and led his embattled force to outmanoeuvre the enemy, inflicting serious enemy casualties." z Captain Michael Reekie, M.M.V.

"Displaying superb judgement, he assessed the changing tactical situation and repositioned his vehicle to maximum advantage, enabling the successful interception and defeat of a numerically superior enemy force." z Corporal Chad Chevrefils, M.M.V.

"...he successfully maneuvered the vehicle through difficult terrain with consummate skill, enabling it to remain unscathed by enemy fire." Mention-in-Dispatches z Sergeant Vince Adams, C.D.

"...he implemented effective perimeter security and co-ordinated the extraction and recovery of an overturned light armoured vehicle as well as the subsequent withdrawal of his platoon." z Corporal William Elliott "...he successfully engaged the enemy, skillfully conducted ammunition uploads and prevented a potential "friendly-fire" incident with an Afghan National Security Force vehicle." z Corporal Nigel Gregg "...he continuously and effectively engaged the enemy with his personal weapon, while at the same time acting as

The fight of their lives Surrounded by Taliban, cut off from reinforcements, Alpha Company earned 60s honou

loader for the vehicle's primary ammunition bin." z Sergeant Daniel Holley "...he effectively engaged the enemy with his vehicle's weapons systems, while providing strong leadership and encouragement to his less experienced crew." z Corporal Timmy Dean Wilkins "...he effectively employed the vehicle's general purpose machine gun to suppress a group of enemy fighters on one side of the vehicle." — Excerpts from the military citations announced by the Governor General in February and late April. Full citations listed at www.gg.ca/honours/.