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Even bribes fail to beat Afghan system; The country's only honest border guard is just doing his job

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even bribes fail to beat Afghan system; The country's only honest border guard is just doing his job1

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

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

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

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

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

After hearing my litany of woes as a convoy prepared to leave the base under his command, Lt.-Col. Bob Chamberlain made the obvious observation. "I don't want YOU anywhere near ME." With that, he placed me in the last armoured car of the convoy while he took a position up front. Don't misconstrue all this poor-me stuff as the whining bleat of a journalist stranded in a dangerous amenity-free backwater. It's been an interesting adventure. And the guest house where I'm stranded has a nice garden and serves cold beer on demand.

It's just a triple warning to anyone preparing to visit this sad war-torn country.

Keep your visa current and devoid of exit stamps before you actually depart Afghanistan. Understand that bribes only work 99.5 per cent of the time. And if I'm still stranded here when you arrive, keep your distance just in case non-stop disaster afflictions are contagious.

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Even bribes fail to beat Afghan system; The country's only honest border guard is just doing his job²

Troops face decision deadline; As conflict drags on, the Canadian military has some hard choices to make

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Senior members of our armed forces are openly questioning whether it will be possible to withdraw from Afghanistan any time soon. Gen. Rick Hillier, chief of the defence staff, now says he doubts the Afghan national army will be ready to bear the brunt of defending the country by February 2009. That is Canada's deadline for a pullout, unless Parliament votes for an extension.

Hillier's misgivings were reinforced when our former commanding officer in Afghanistan, Brig.-Gen. Tim Grant, made similar statements about the slow progress of the police force in that country. Those remarks might cause some heartburn in the prime minister's office. Stephen Harper is known to favour continuing our military involvement.

Nevertheless, generals Hillier and Grant have posed an important question. Are our goals in Afghanistan achievable within a two-year timetable, or indeed within any horizon we could reasonably contemplate?

At the outset of the mission, the objectives seemed clear enough — to prevent the return of a Taliban-style government, and to help establish a democratic state. Certainly those goals are morally defensible, and well within our country's tradition of peacekeeping in troubled regions.

But whether they are attainable within a practical timeframe is another question. The Taliban, as we now see, was not a local affair, but a joint venture of terrorists and fanatics from across the Middle East. It has roots far beyond the present conflict.

And democracy as we know it took centuries of civil war, revolution and upheaval to create. It might not be the kind of short-term project our politicians seem to envisage.

Yet on the other hand, we cannot garrison Afghanistan indefinitely without becoming invaders rather than peace-bringers. It is this collision of ideals with reality, rather than the fickleness of public opinion, that undermines support for the mission.

What, then, is to be done? At a minimum, we need benchmarks to measure progress, such as the U.S. government is now using in Iraq. These should be social and economic as well as military. They might include new schools and hospitals opened, free elections for local councils, and gains in equality for women and religious minorities. We must know what we're fighting for, as well as against.

If the NATO allies agree on a common set of yardsticks, we could decide whether to stay or not on grounds everyone understands. And if it becomes necessary for us to leave Afghanistan before a peaceful settlement emerges, our action can be defended in the court of international opinion.

Troops face decision deadline; As conflict drags on, the Canadian military has some hard choices to make

We also need a clear-headed discussion of the likely consequences for the Afghan people if the NATO allies leave in the near future. Generals Hillier and Grant say the fledgling democracy of President Hamid Karzai cannot sustain itself in such an eventuality.

What then? Will the same thugs who led the previous regime return to "cleanse" the country of collaborators? Or will some less murderous government take hold and, hopefully, move the country forward? We have a duty to face those questions in deciding whether, and when, to leave.

But at the same time a much broader assessment is required, both as to the lasting power of the terrorist forces we face and their ultimate objectives. The original decision by the U.S. to mount a campaign in Afghanistan grew directly out of the 9/11 attacks. These in turn were motivated, according to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, by a desire to punish the West for sending troops to the Holy Land.

But in the six years since, there have been attacks by al-Qaeda-linked terror groups in 19 countries, many of which had no military presence in the Middle East. This would seem to raise the question whether these groups have merely regional aspirations, or whether their objectives are more global.

If the former is the case, an exit from Afghanistan or Iraq might lead to an accommodation, albeit at some cost to those living in these territories. If the latter, a premature pullout might simply embolden the terrorists to broaden their sights.

This is the discussion we now need to have. The opposition parties in Parliament that are focusing purely on a timetable for withdrawal owe the country — and our Armed Forces — a fuller facing of the consequences.

We didn't insist on a date for withdrawal when we sent troops to fight in two world wars. Moreover, announcing beforehand the limits of our endurance seems likely only to stiffen terrorist resistance.

And the prime minister, who wants to stay on, must place some practical framework around our commitment. The United Kingdom announced last week that most British soldiers are finally leaving Northern Ireland after a deployment of almost 40 years.

There are still American and British troops in Germany, more than six decades after the Second World War came to an end. Is this the kind of involvement NATO expects in Afghanistan? If it is, the burden must certainly be shared by a larger number of countries than are presently involved.

Canada's reputation as a force for stability and decency in the world is at stake.

How we handle our obligations in Afghanistan might affect our sense of self-respect and national honour long after the conflict in that country is over.

Troops face decision deadline; As conflict drags on, the Canadian military has some hard choices to make

Pakistan violence escalates; 22 die; Deteriorating security situation prompts international concern

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DATELINE: MIRANSHAH, Pakistan
BYLINE: Haji Mujtaba
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 363

MIRANSHAH, Pakistan — At least 22 people were killed yesterday in spiralling violence in northwestern Pakistan as international concern grew over the deteriorating security situation and al-Qaeda threat along the Afghan border.

Soldiers repulsed an attack by pro-Taliban fighters in North Waziristan, and a suicide car bomber struck in another tribal area bordering Afghanistan.

North Waziristan is regarded as a hotbed of al-Qaeda and Taliban support, and the United States is expecting the Pakistani military to strike at select targets after insurgents abandoned a peace pact in the semi-autonomous tribal region last month.

While there has been no offensive yet, the army has reinforced check posts and stepped up patrols, provoking a series of attacks in recent weeks that have added to mounting concern over the country's deteriorating security situation.

How to make Pakistan do more to eradicate al-Qaeda hideouts has become a hot topic in the U.S. election campaign, with Democratic hopeful Barack Obama talking of American forces conducting operations or strikes inside Pakistani territory.

During a telephone call to President Pervez Musharraf, U.S. President George W. Bush said this kind of talk was "unsavoury," and assured the Pakistani leader Washington respected its ally's sovereignty, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry said Friday.

On the ground, in a pre-dawn attack yesterday, insurgents bombarded a check post in the Dosali area, some 40 kilometres south of Miranshah, North Waziristan's main town.

Troops repulsed the guerrillas when they launched a direct assault on the post.

"Militants fired about 50 rockets on a check post complex ... and then they carried out a physical attack on the check post," military spokesman Maj.-Gen. Waheed Arshad said.

"Four security forces were killed and four wounded, while 10 militants were also killed in the attack."

Arshad said the guerrillas had fled after about two hours carrying four to five bodies with them.

In the neighbouring Kurram tribal region, a suicide car bomber rammed another car on a road through a bazaar in the main town of Parachinar, paramilitary officer Mohammad Kafeer said.

"The death toll has reached eight, and there are another 37 people being treated for blast wounds," Dr. Hanif Jan, medical superintendent at Agency Headquarters Hospital in Parachinar, told Reuters. Two wounded were in a critical condition.

Violence has intensified in Pakistan since last month's military assault on Islamabad's Red Mosque to crush a militant Islamist movement. Some 102 people were killed during the siege and assault on the mosque.

Afghan official: War ending soon; But suicide bomber kills two civilians near convoy of coalition troops

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Barry Donnelly, CanWest News Service / AsadullahKhalid, governor of Kandahar province, says the end of the war in Afghanistan is "not very far" away. He was interviewed yesterday by CanWest News Service at Kandahar Airfield. Khalid also said the province's security is improving "day by day." ; Photo: CNS file photo / Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, left, and Gen. Rick Hillier have differing views on how long Canadian troops will remain in Afghanistan. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 431

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan--The NATO-led coalition is winning the war in Afghanistan and the end of the conflict is "not very far" away, the governor of Kandahar province said yesterday, even as a suicide car bomb killed two civilians in the province's capital.

Police said the attacker drove close to a convoy of coalition troops and detonated the bomb. Four other civilians were injured.

The attack took place on a road used by coalition forces to reach the western Panjwahi and Zhari districts of the province, as well as neighbouring Helmand province.

Canadian military officials said no Canadians were in the convoy but would not say which country the troops were from.

But Asadullah Khalid, Kandahar's governor, said the province's security is improving "day by day."

"Last year in Kandahar at the same time we had three suicide attacks per day," said Khalid in an interview.

"We cannot say that tomorrow all terrorist activity will stop. ... But in general, the security situation is good in Kandahar, and it is getting better day by day."

He even suggested the day is drawing near when Canadian troops can hand over security responsibilities to the Afghan army and police force.

"We need them until the end of this war," Khalid said of the Canadian military. "But the end of this war is not very far."

The governor's comments come at a time of considerable debate over the success of coalition operations in southern Afghanistan, as well as the need for Canadian troops to play a leading combat role.

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said recently that Canadian troops could be pulled back from the front lines more quickly than expected as the military ramps up training of Afghan soldiers.

But Canada's top soldier, Gen. Rick Hillier, says it will be a "long while" before the army is ready to take control.

Opinion on the Afghan side has also been split. Kandahar's new police chief and a federal minister in charge of rural rehabilitation recently urged Canadian troops to stay beyond February 2009, the withdrawal date set by the Canadian government.

Khalid conceded that some areas of the province are still "hostage" to Taliban influence.

But he said the province, aided by Canadian military support and aid money, has been pushing forward with a number of reconstruction projects, such as the rebuilding of a dam that supplies water to seven districts.

"If you saw where we were five years ago and where we are today, you will see a big difference," the governor said.

This month, the province announced 72 reconstruction projects, including the construction of schools, mosques and irrigation systems.

Khalid said reforms of the Afghan National Police, widely viewed as corrupt and susceptible to Taliban infiltration, are coming along.

"We started to rebuild the army four years ago, and the police are four years behind, but the police are getting better."

Canadian troops have been engaged in less toe-to-toe fighting with the Taliban than last summer, but suicide attacks and roadside bombs remain a persistent threat.

Last month, a roadside bomb killed six Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter travelling in a convoy about 20 kilometres southwest of Kandahar City.

Military commanders said the bomb, which ripped through a heavily armoured RG-31 Nyala vehicle, was the biggest they had ever seen.

British score recent gains against Taliban

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BYLINE: Carlotta Gall
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SANGIN, Afghanistan -- Until a few weeks ago, Sangin was one of the most dangerous towns in Afghanistan's most dangerous province, Helmand.

Since their arrival last spring in this lawless region, British troops have lost 64 men in combat against the Taliban. The insurgents still control half the province, the most serious threat to Afghanistan's stability.

Yet despite the presence of thousands of Taliban fighters, and tough fighting still ahead, British commanders here say they have turned a corner. In recent months, they have pushed the Taliban back and kept them out of some strategic areas. And, they say, popular support for the insurgents is eroding.

"We see it now as a threat that can be countered," Maj. Hamish Bell, second in command of the British battalion deployed in northern Helmand, said of the insurgency.

The progress in Helmand is perhaps the most important anywhere in the country, military commanders say, given that the province has the largest concentration of insurgents and produces 42 per cent of Afghanistan's opium crop, which has helped fuel the insurgency. If they can get Helmand right, they say, it could pave the way to broader progress against the Taliban.

Commanders say the progress in Helmand is an indication that NATO forces have found their stride since last year, when the Taliban staged a spectacular resurgence, taking advantage of the hand-over of southern provinces from U.S. commanders to an expanding NATO force.

As NATO forces have become better established and more numerous in southern Afghanistan, U.S. forces have been able to deploy more troops in the east. All of this has helped NATO forces take the offensive against the Taliban, rather than fighting from their back foot, as they had to do last year, and gain local confidence.

What has made the difference here, the British say, is a shift in their tactics and a doubling of force numbers, to nearly 6,000 today, with more troops on the way.

"It's not over, but indications are that the uplift in forces and the more-offensive mindset has been successful," said Maj. Dominic Biddick, a commander now based in Sangin. The British base, once virtually under siege, has not taken a single hit in a month, he said.

South Korean killed by Taliban honoured

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SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Anthony Deutsch

WORD COUNT: 247

BUNDANG, South Korea – Friends and relatives of a South Korean volunteer worker killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan packed a church memorial service Saturday where hundreds wept, sang hymns and prayed for 21 remaining hostages.

Shim Sung-min, 29, was killed Monday after being taken hostage with 22 other South Koreans in southern Afghanistan. They were kidnapped in Ghazni province on July 19 as they travelled by bus from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar.

"We can only hope for the safe return of the 21 other hostages to their country and families," Sim Jin-pyo, his father, told hundreds gathered at a university hospital near the capital, Seoul. "He sacrificed himself to help others. Let us hope he can continue his work in heaven."

Family members wailed at his closed casket after joining in prayers also attended by politicians. His body will be donated for research. Legislator Lee Geun-sik condemned the killing, saying "God will not forgive those responsible for this barbaric act."

The Taliban, who also shot dead a pastor who headed the aid mission, has threatened to kill more hostages if their demand for the release of fighters held by the Afghan government is not met.

In Afghanistan, a venue was being sought in government territory where Taliban representatives could hold talks with a Korean delegation, possibly under United Nations supervision.

South Korea has sent diplomatic teams to Afghanistan and the United States, seen as a last hope in resolving the hostage crisis, hoping to persuade Washington to make an exception to its policy of non-negotiation with terrorists.

Afghanistan's poppy production up again

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SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Matthew Lee

ILLUSTRATION: A farmer collects resin from poppies on an opium poppy field in Bati Kot district of Nangarhar province, east of Kabul, Afghanistan. (Rahmat Gul / AP)

WORD COUNT: 699

WASHINGTON – Afghanistan will produce another record poppy harvest this year that cements its status as the world's near-sole supplier of the heroin source, yet a furious debate over how to reverse the trend is stalling proposals to cut the crop, U.S. officials say.

As U.S. President George W. Bush prepares for weekend talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, divisions within the U.S. administration and among NATO allies have delayed release of a US\$475 million counternarcotics program for Afghanistan, where intelligence officials see growing links between drugs and the Taliban, the officials said.

UN figures to be released in September are expected to show that Afghanistan's poppy production has risen up to 15 per cent since 2006 and that the country now accounts for 95 per cent of the world's crop, three percentage points more than last year, officials familiar with preliminary statistics told The Associated Press.

But counterdrug proposals by some U.S. officials have met fierce resistance, including boosting the amount of forcible poppy field destruction in provinces that grow the most, officials said. The approach also would link millions of dollars in development aid to benchmarks on eradication; arrests and prosecutions of narcotransporters, corrupt officials; and on alternative crop production.

Those ideas represent what proponents call an "enhanced carrot-and-stick approach" to supplement existing anti-drug efforts. They are the focus of the new US\$475 million program outlined in a 995-page report, the release of which has been postponed twice and may be again delayed due to disagreements, officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because parts of the report remain classified.

Counternarcotics agents at the State Department had wanted to release a 123-page summary of the strategy last month and then again last week, but were forced to hold off because of concerns it may not be feasible, the officials said.

Now, even as Bush sees Karzai on Sunday and Monday at the presidential retreat in Camp David, Md., a tentative release date of Aug. 9, timed to follow the meetings, appears in jeopardy. Some in the administration, along with NATO allies Britain and Canada, seek revisions that could delay it until at least Aug. 13, the officials said.

The program represents a 13 per cent increase over the \$420 million in U.S. counternarcotics aid to Afghanistan last year. It would adopt a bold new approach to "coercive eradication" and set out criteria for local officials to receive development assistance based on their co-operation, the officials said.

Although the existing aid, supplemented mainly by Britain and Canada and supported by the NATO force in Afghanistan, has achieved some results – notably an expected rise in the number of "poppy-free" provinces from six to at least 12 and possibly 16, mainly in the north – production elsewhere has soared, they said.

"Afghanistan is providing close to 95 per cent of the world's heroin," the State Department's top counternarcotics official, Tom Schweich, said at a recent conference. "That makes it almost a sole-source supplier" and presents a situation "unique in world history."

Almost all the heroin from Afghanistan makes its way to Europe; most of the heroin in the U.S. comes from Latin America.

Afghanistan last year accounted for 92 per cent of global opium production, compared with 70 per cent in 2000 and 52 per cent a decade earlier. The higher yields in Afghanistan brought world production to a record high of 7,286 tonnes in 2006, 43 per cent more than in 2005.

A State Department inspector general's report released Friday noted that the counternarcotics assistance is dwarfed by the estimated \$38 billion "street value" of Afghanistan's poppy crop, if all is converted to heroin, and said eradication goals were "not realistic."

Schweich, an advocate of the now-stalled plan, has argued for more vigorous eradication efforts, particularly in southern Helmand province, responsible for some 80 per cent of Afghanistan's poppy production. It is where, he says, growers must be punished for ignoring good-faith appeals to switch to alternative, but less lucrative, crops.

"They need to be dealt with in a more severe way," he said at the conference sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "There needs to be a coercive element, that's something we're not going to back away from or shy away from."

Saving children's lives

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BYLINE: Kim Malcolm
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 239

Don Martin's report from Afghanistan brings to light another of Canada's — and CIDA's — successes in development aid for children.

Canada is already known as a leader in providing cost-effective prevention and treatment for preventable disease and illness, especially pneumonia, malaria and diarrhea, which are the top three killers of children under five.

Canada's distribution of vitamin A supplements has saved the lives of 2.1 million children since 1998, at a cost of only four cents per dose.

Child mortality was reduced by 20 per cent in 11 West African countries as the result of a three-year CIDA-UNICEF pilot project begun in 2003. This program, which brought immunizations, micronutrient supplements, oral rehydration therapies, and bed nets to local communities, along with appropriate interventions for pregnant women, cost a mere \$500 per life saved. Since then, Mali and Ghana have adopted the program on a national basis, and the African Union has asked for it to be implemented across sub-Saharan Africa, where a staggering five million children die every year from preventable and treatable illnesses.

With successes like these, one wonders why Canada doesn't concentrate its efforts on reducing child mortality.

Focusing on proven, cost-effective solutions to basic health problems would confirm Canada's leading role in child survival initiatives and provide an example to others in achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

Kim Malcolm,

Ottawa

Why lessons of Northern Ireland may or may not apply to Iraq; All bets are off if urban conflict in Baghdad spawns a regional war

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BYLINE: Peter Zimonjic
SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen
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LONDON – This week the troops came home. Well, actually, they were already home, they were just stood down — in Northern Ireland, that is.

The army operation in Northern Ireland was the longest in British military history.

When it ended this week, after 38 years, when the flag was lowered at Thiepval Barracks in Lisburn, headquarters of the British military in the province since the start of the Troubles, it was a quiet affair.

There was no cause for celebration, because since British troops first arrived in 1969, death and sorrow brought shame to everyone involved. Too many people died, too much was lost. The economy was crushed and the community divided.

Now, so many years later, there seems to be a peace that many times was thought impossible. The resolution of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics came only when the most extreme leaders on both sides found enough common ground to sit next to one another in government rather than on opposite sides of a battlefield.

Nearly four decades is a long time to resolve a conflict that was, essentially, isolated from the rest of the world, geographically and politically. Sure there was overseas funding from the American Irish community and some from sympathizers on the British mainland, but when we consider the lack of international players in this drama, it really is amazing to think that it took so long to bring these two peoples together.

Of course, conflicts are often difficult to resolve and lessons take a long time to sink in, more so when tainted by violence. It has been said many times that the British Army learned in Northern Ireland a great deal about how to manage a military conflict, how to minimize violence in an urban setting. The newest American field manual for dealing with counterinsurgency in Iraq reportedly draws heavily on the British experience during the troubles.

Yet looking at the mess in Iraq, it is hard to imagine when that country will ever resemble the post-troubled Northern Ireland we see today. If the greatest concern we had was that it would take 38 years of deployment in Iraq to achieve peace, we would probably smile, for at least there would be an end in sight. But Iraq was never going to be that simple.

Why lessons of Northern Ireland may or may not apply to Iraq; All bets are off if urban conflict in Baghdad spawns a regional war

Going into Iraq, as scholars and analysts understood, would require great planning in order to keep the country from falling apart and becoming a Hobbsean war of every person against every other person. In the leadup to the invasion, Charles Tripp, author of *A History of Iraq*, told me exactly that.

Everyone knew that a regional war was possible, as well as the Hobbsean one, but it seemed a long way off.

Not so anymore.

On Monday the U.S. announced a massive arms sales package to Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel in what can only be an effort to shore up the potential enemies of Iran in case a regional conflict ensues. The long way off is not so far away.

Now we have a situation in which Iran is being threatened by the U.S., no option is "off the table," regional powers are being sold massive arms caches, and hopes for peace in Iraq are virtually lost. We have Iran interfering quite boldly in Iraq, and we have very poor diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States. The situation is teetering on massive regional conflict.

It seems to me that there is just a little bit too much tough diplomatic talk and unhelpful action, in the way of arms deals and threats, on the part of the current American administration to be of any positive force in a situation that could quickly spiral out of control.

War is an escalation of violence. Piece by piece, atrocity by atrocity, death by death, the violence builds until we find ourselves in a world where nations are at war with other nations. This invasion of Iraq was intended, so we were told, to make the world a safer place when now, it seems obvious that not only is the world less safe but it is threatened with being dragged into wider bloodshed.

The only way for this threat to diminish is for Iraq to be made stable as soon as possible. This will probably require more troops — American troops — if it is going to happen. Shifting sparse forces around in a cat-and-mouse game with insurgents across Iraq is not working there, nor is it working in Afghanistan.

When we look at the British experience in Northern Ireland, and how long it took to resolve without any of the same kind of regional pressures and conflicts brewing, it seems obvious that the lessons of how to deal with an urban counterinsurgency may soon be useless.

If a regional war of country against country, army against army, does break out, then the lessons from Ulster — how to engage an enemy in a city while at the same time winning over the people getting caught in the crossfire — will be of minimal value. People once again will be dying on battlefields, not just on street corners.

Peter Zimonjic is a Canadian journalist in London. Read his blog on life in England at ottawacitizen.com/blogs

Hostage pleads for help as prisoner swap ruled out; 'We are all innocent people, we came here to help sick people but now we are all sick,' says South Korean

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PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Sports
PAGE: A8
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters / Kim Mi-ok, the mother of slain ShimSung-min, 29, who was kidnapped and killed by the Taliban, cries during her son's funeral Saturday in South Korea. ;
KEYWORDS: 0
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France-Presse
WORD COUNT: 317

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – A purported South Korean hostage made an emotional plea for help in a telephone call with AFP on Saturday as a negotiator again ruled out freeing Taliban prisoners in exchange for the 21 captives.

The woman, who said she was being held with three others in the church aid group captured more than two weeks ago, said the captives were ill and finding it hard to survive.

"I don't want to die. We want to go home," she said in English in a call set up by Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi. "I don't know how long we can survive," she said.

One of her purported captors telephoned an AFP journalist from an unknown location and then handed the phone to the woman, who introduced herself with a Korean name that was not recognized. There was no immediate way of verifying that she was one of 23 South Korean church aid workers kidnapped in the southern province of Ghazni on July 19.

"Every day it's really hard to survive. We really want to go home, we are all sick and weak," she said.

"Please save us ... we are all innocent people, we came here to help sick people but now we are all sick."

She appeared to ask that no military operation be conducted to free the group, saying, "please no war, if there is a war we will be really in danger."

Speaking in Afghanistan's Dari language earlier, the woman said the group had been split up. "I don't know about the others, if they're alive," she said.

The Taliban has shot dead two hostages, both men, since the group was seized. They have warned that more captives would be killed unless some of their fighters are released from jail, a demand the government has rejected.

Hostage pleads for help as prisoner swap ruled out; 'We are all innocent people, we came here to help sick people but now we are all sick,' says South Korean

The woman pleaded with the South Korean and Afghan governments, UN chief Ban Ki-moon and Pope Benedict XVI to help win the release of the aid mission.

The militants said after their latest deadline expired Wednesday they had not killed any more hostages because they were hoping for results from talks with the South Koreans.

An Afghan negotiator again ruled out Saturday an exchange of Taliban prisoners to free the group.

O'Connor shuffling out of defence portfolio: news reports; Prentice rumoured to be tapped for difficult post

IDNUMBER 200708050024
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 253

OTTAWA – Gordon O'Connor will be bumped in out of the defence portfolio in a cabinet shuffle expected in the week of Aug. 13, according to a report Saturday night.

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

A shuffle this month would be Harper's second change to his cabinet since coming to power in 2006. His officials have told CanWest News that a shuffle won't elevate any backbenchers to the club; only existing ministers will be moved around.

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

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

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

The expected cabinet shuffle comes as a new poll shows Harper's Conservatives are still failing to improve their support among the electorate.

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

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

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

Security at Vancouver Olympics a complicated, costly problem; With budget trouble and terrorism threats, officials try to strike balance between safety and atmosphere

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DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Vancouver Sun, CanWest News Service, File / The Whistler Sliding Centre under construction on the slopes of Blackcomb Mountain ;
KEYWORDS: OLYMPICS; VANCOUVER/WHISTLER; CANADA
DATELINE: VANCOUVER
BYLINE: Jeff Lee and Miro Cernetig
SOURCE: Vancouver Sun
WORD COUNT: 1117

VANCOUVER – With just over 900 days to go before the 2010 Winter Olympics, recent events involving security raise the question of whether British Columbia will be turned into "Fortress B.C." to protect the Games.

A bomb scare last week at BC Ferries forced the cancellation of 21 sailings and raised the spectre of airport-style security checks.

The RCMP-led Vancouver 2010 Integrated Security Unit acknowledged it can't protect the Games for the \$175 million it has been given.

And protests this spring by the Anti-Poverty Coalition forced the repeated call-out of the Vancouver Police crowd-control unit and mounted squad, and the erection of fences around public spaces.

Into this mix add a host of world events — the rapid rise of militant extremism, Millennium Bomber Ahmed Ressaam, the Sept. 11 attacks, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the four London bombings — which had the impact of driving up threat levels. What will the Lower Mainland look like in 2010 when the world comes calling? Will it be a city under siege? Will it be like the recent International Olympic Committee conference in Guatemala City, one of Central America's most dangerous cities, where an entire neighbourhood was cordoned off and secured by 6,000 machine-gun-toting soldiers and police? Even International Olympic Committee members who are accustomed to security complained about being subjected to bomb-sniffing dogs and regular pat-downs, and to the sight of heavily armed soldiers posted at hotel driveways.

"That's not our way of doing things," said Sgt. Pierre Lemaitre, spokesman for the RCMP's Olympic security unit. "Our approach is very Canadian, subtle, but very prepared. The Canadian way is not to have a vision of barbed wire and a Stalag compound. We don't want that."

The IOC doesn't want a heavy military presence overshadowing its Games, which are supposed to celebrate sport, excellence of the human spirit through achievement, and peace.

Security at Vancouver Olympics a complicated, costly problem; With budget trouble and terrorism threats, officials try to strike balance between safety and atmosphere

A city geared for trouble from terrorists and domestic strife is an incongruous image, said Kevin Wamsley, the former director of Olympic studies at the University of Western Ontario. But organizers understand they reduce security at the public's peril, Wamsley said. One only has to look at what happened in Salt Lake City, five months after 9/11.

"Salt Lake was clearly understood as a military fortress," Wamsley said. "I think the sentiment among athletes was that there was no way any (terrorist) was getting through there."

The official 2010 Olympic venues are spread out over Vancouver, Richmond, West Vancouver and Whistler. But there are many more places and facilities that need to be protected, from Vancouver International Airport to the city's harbour to the Vancouver Integrated Security Unit (VISU) and Vanoc offices.

John Thompson, president of the Toronto-based Mackenzie Institute, a think-tank concerned with organized violence and political instability, said by its nature, security can't be completely effective.

"You can't secure a whole city. You can secure an Olympic village or a venue, but you can't secure a whole city.

"Nobody has that much in the way of resources," Thompson said. "There's never a guarantee. No protection, no defence, no barrier is 100-per-cent effective, under any circumstances."

Officials, however, say that it would be wrong to focus simply on the terror threats surrounding the Olympics. Wes Shoemaker, associate deputy minister for Emergency Management B.C., said complex plans are being developed to deal with everything from a fire to a hazardous material spill. There are even evacuation plans in the unlikely event something falls from outer space.

"One of the 57 hazards is space debris," said Shoemaker. "It's an all-hazards approach."

Those attending the Olympic venues, said Kevin Begg, assistant deputy minister and director of B.C. police services, can expect far tighter security than they are used to. "Yes, people going out to a sporting scene will go through a screening process," he said.

But Begg also said the Olympics won't be turned into a police blockade. "This is Canada. We try to mount an appropriate level of security that is not in your face but is there to draw on."

The RCMP won't talk specifically about what they have planned or what they consider is their worst-case scenario.

"We're actually not going to answer that because if somebody out there who wants to bring harm and mayhem to the Games has any clue that 'this' is what we are prepared to do in a worst-case scenario, they could up the ante," Lemaitre said.

Lemaitre said surveillance is already being used to keep tabs on potential troublemakers. "Even today, in preparation for the Games, we have intelligence units who are working and keeping a pulse on anybody who may have reasons to bring mayhem and harm to our Canadian society."

The demand on security forces is staggering. According to the bid book used to win the Games — which the RCMP now say underestimated the cost of security — more than 12,350 RCMP, police, private security and other guards were expected to be used to protect 5,000 athletes and officials, 10,000 media, 25,000 volunteers and hundreds of thousands of spectators and visitors.

The draft plan included everything from the restriction of airspace and waterways to the use of intelligence

Security at Vancouver Olympics a complicated, costly problem; With budget trouble and terrorism threats, o

services and the military. Lemaitre says VISU is also drawing on all of the specialist teams, such as the Emergency Response Team, hostage negotiators, crowd control units, bomb-detection units and others.

The official cost-sharing agreement the federal and provincial governments signed last December lays out more clearly the scope of what's available to the VISU: the RCMP across the country, West Vancouver and Vancouver police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Canadian Armed Forces, bylaw enforcement officers from every Olympic municipality, the E-Comm emergency communications centre, and "any federal or provincial public servant and any other federal, provincial or municipal agency."

It's hard to imagine how all of that security could be provided for the original estimate of \$175 million.

The RCMP has repeatedly told the public the budget was adequate. But privately, VISU's officers have been raising alarm bells. The bid was so poorly constructed, they said, that it did not include a range of services VISU says it now has to provide, from security checks for upwards of 100,000 volunteers, to security on more than 100 venues — five times what was originally envisioned.

Nobody in any official capacity is saying how much larger the bill will be. But security experts guarantee that Vancouver can expect a major presence of the Canadian forces in 2010. And the cost of that alone — just the military, not the expenses associated with the RCMP and other security measures — will far exceed the original estimate.

"I'd be looking more in the half-billion-dollar range ... just for the military," said Scott Taylor, a former soldier who runs the military magazine *Esprit de Corps* out of Ottawa. "A lot of the costs will be incremental and they'll try to hide them. They'll say, 'We were flying those helicopters anyway.' "

CanWest News Service

Straight talk from the Senate on real cost of Armed Forces

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SECTION: The Editorial Page
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ILLUSTRATION: Cartoon: (See hard copy for illustration).;
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA
BYLINE: Colin Kenny
SOURCE: For The Calgary Herald
WORD COUNT: 1275

If there were a national contest to determine the most active, robust, blood-stirring institution in Canada, the Canadian Forces would probably win — and deservedly so. While citizens are divided over the value of the current mission to Afghanistan, the image of Canadian soldiers hasn't glowed more brightly for a long time.

On the other hand, if there were a contest for the most passive, drowsy, turgid institution in Canada, the Canadian Senate would probably win. I firmly believe senators often produce more useful work than those elected folks over in the Commons.

But I can't deny we had an image problem even before the prime minister began his campaign to discredit us.

Say, did I actually just have the audacity to claim senators often produce more useful work than elected MPs? You want proof, you say.

Well, let's get back to that blood-stirring institution I mentioned off the top — the Canadian Forces. Which institution has a more useful vision of Canada's military — the Commons, or the Senate?

Our national government rules the country from the Commons. The primary role of that national government should be the physical protection of its citizens, plus the advancement of their interests at home and abroad. To do this effectively — particularly in times of domestic or international crises — a country needs a military with a little muscle on its bones.

Not everybody agrees. There are many Canadians who decry the use of military force generally. And, given the number of stupid wars that have taken so many lives over the centuries, they have a point. But anyone who lives in the real world knows tyrants don't bend to diplomatic pressure unless there is the threat of force behind that pressure. We're simply not going to help contribute to a better world by eviscerating our military.

I believe the people who have been running our country for the past couple of decades — be they Liberals or Conservatives — have declined to invest reasonable amounts of public money into Canada's military. I also think this is likely to leave the physical, economic and cultural protection of future generations of Canadians largely to chance.

How, you ask, can I lump the Conservative government currently ruling the country with the preceding Liberal governments that allowed our military to slip into such steep decline? Aren't the Conservatives out

announcing they intend to buy all kinds of expensive weaponry? Didn't they extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan — a mission that follows the sensible adage that threats to Canadians are best dealt with at a safe distance from our shores?

I acknowledge that "yes" is the honest response to both these questions.

But the greater truth is that Canada currently spends about half of what reasonable (and peace-loving) countries spend on defence, and the Conservative government's announced budgetary planning would do almost nothing to change that.

Countries such as the Netherlands spend about two per cent of gross national product on their armed forces. That's pretty well the norm for midsized industrialized countries that use their military judiciously, rather than aggressively.

Back in 1991, Canada spent 1.6 per cent of GNP on defence. We're now down to about 1.1 per cent. Although the long-overdue "Canada First Defence Strategy" has yet to be released, spending options have been leaked and none of them would change that percentage by more than a hair.

Yes, the "new" government has set aside money for trucks, helicopters, transport planes and replenishment ships, and it has purchased tanks for Afghanistan. But nearly all of these are purchases even the frugal Liberals would have to have made.

Meanwhile, the transformation and growth of the Canadian Forces promised under the stewardship of Gen. Rick Hillier is in disarray. Transformation can only take place if a lot of experienced, insightful officers are giving it their full attention. With Afghanistan at the centre of everything, this can't happen.

Growing the Forces requires more than recruitment — it requires the training of recruits. With a rotation in Afghanistan every six months, a large part of the army is either in Afghanistan, returning from Afghanistan or preparing to go to Afghanistan. That leaves a shortage of experienced personnel to train newcomers.

Growth and transformation will require a lot more personnel, more equipment and, most importantly, more money. If Prime Minister Steven Harper doesn't come through with the money, he is going to leave Hillier and his hamstrung plans for Canada's military out to dry.

Of course, the Afghanistan mission is sucking vital funds away from the rebuilding initiative. The price tag for Afghanistan — without salaries — will undoubtedly be well over \$4 billion by February 2009.

But, while Afghanistan certainly contributes to the problem of rebuilding Canada's military, it is by no means the crux of the problem. The crux of the problem is lack of political will. This lack of will is based on what various national parties think they can get away during election campaigns.

One minority party — the NDP — is naive, bordering on pacifist. The other — the Bloc Quebecois — would undoubtedly be willing to spend plenty on creating viable armed forces for Quebec, but not for Canada.

The Liberals are not pacifists. But Jean Chretien and Paul Martin spent a decade fighting debt on the back of the Canadian Forces, and Stephane Dion has shown no sign he considers military reconstruction a national priority.

The Conservatives have been clever, which certainly isn't the same as being honest or honourable. By default, they have already won the votes of most people who pay attention to military issues — people who believe sovereign states need a reasonable military capacity to protect citizens against foreign and domestic threats.

These people may well understand there isn't much of a chance this government intends to spend the money required to bring Canada's military capacity up to respectable, Dutch-like standards. But what other party are they going to vote for? At least the Conservatives make the occasional gesture.

But the Conservatives have no intention of alienating that vast array of Canadian voters who believe our nation should be peaceful, and friendly, and very unlike those war-mongering Americans.

So the government refuses to commit to more than token increases in military expenditures — it will honour its election commitment to spending approximately \$1 billion a year over and above what its Liberal predecessors were spending.

Most, if not all of that money will be eaten up by Afghanistan.

Which brings us back to my mention of the Senate, which I claimed sometimes does things better than the Commons does.

One thing the Senate does better is not playing these sleight-of-hand political games. Being (despicably) unelected, it doesn't have to. Nor, admittedly, does it have to balance military spending against other kinds of spending that voters demand.

So the Senate can be honest. The Senate — through our Committee on National Security and Defence — can tell you that if this government's military spending plans continue on course until 2011–12, Canada's defence budget will be about \$21 billion in that budgetary year.

It can also add up the basic needs of the military by then — without any frills — and inform you that a more realistic budget for a reasonably funded Armed Forces would be more than \$30 billion — perhaps \$35 billion — in 2011–12.

And I can tell you that our Committee came to that conclusion (a) in a bipartisan, unanimous way and (b) without taking the cost of the extended Afghanistan mission into consideration.

Nobody likes this kind of ugly honesty (which may be part of the reason we senators have such a lousy reputation). But, like it or not, Canadians deserve to know what no Canadian political party seems brave enough to tell them: that, if Canada is going to be prepared for the foreign and domestic crises that are likely to come at us, that preparedness is going to cost quite a bit more money than the politicians are pretending it is.

That's the message from the Senate. Hey, just trying to earn our keep.

Colin Kenny is chairman of the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence.

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Kandahar's governor says conflict near end; Suicide attack kills two civilians in provincial capital

IDNUMBER: 200708050029
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Barry Donnelly, CanWest News Service / AsadullahKhalid, governor of Kandahar province, says the end of the war in Afghanistan is "not very far" away, contradicting several high-ranking military officials, including Canadian General Rick Hillier. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS; EXPLOSIONS
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 353

The NATO-led coalition is winning the war in Afghanistan and the end of the conflict is "not very far" away, the governor of Kandahar province said Saturday, even as a suicide car bomb killed two civilians in the province's capital.

Police said the attacker drove close to a convoy of coalition troops and detonated the bomb. Four other civilians were injured.

The attack took place on a road used by coalition forces to reach the western Panjwahi and Zhari districts of the province, as well as neighbouring Helmand province.

Canadian military officials said no Canadians were in the convoy, but would not say which country the troops were from.

But Asadullah Khalid, Kandahar's governor, said the province's security is improving "day by day."

"Last year in Kandahar at the same time we had three suicide attacks per day," said Khalid in an interview with CanWest News Service.

"We cannot say that tomorrow all terrorist activity will stop . . . But in general, the security situation is good in Kandahar and it is getting better day by day."

He even suggested the day is drawing near when Canadian troops can hand over security responsibilities to the Afghan army and police force.

"We need them until the end of this war," Khalid said of the Canadian military. "But the end of this war is not very far."

The governor's comments come at a time of considerable debate over the success of coalition operations in southern Afghanistan, as well as the need for Canadian troops to play a leading combat role.

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor said recently that Canadian troops could be pulled back from the front lines more quickly than expected as the military ramps up training of Afghan soldiers.

But Canada's top soldier, General Rick Hillier, says it will be a "long while" before the army is ready to take control.

Khalid conceded that some areas of the province are still "hostage" to Taliban influence.

But he said the province, aided by Canadian military support and aid money, has been pushing forward with a number of reconstruction projects, such as the rebuilding of a dam that supplies water to seven districts.

This month, the province announced 72 reconstruction projects, including the construction of schools, mosques and irrigation systems.

Khalid said reforms of the Afghan National Police, widely viewed as corrupt and susceptible to Taliban infiltration, are coming along.

Canadian troops have been engaged in less toe-to-toe fighting with the Taliban than last summer, but suicide attacks and roadside bombs remain a persistent threat.

Last month, a roadside bomb killed six Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter travelling in a convoy near Kandahar City.

Purported hostage makes desperate plea; Caller says Taliban captives 'sick and weak'

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PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
COLUMN: Asia Report: News From the Region
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Reuters / The parents of a slain South Korean aidworker, who was kidnapped and killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, cry during their son's funeral at a hospital south of Seoul on Saturday. ;
KEYWORDS: RELIGION; CLERGY
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Shoib Najafizada
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 294

A purported South Korean hostage made an emotional plea for help in a telephone call with Agence France–Presse on Saturday as a negotiator again ruled out freeing Taliban prisoners in exchange for the 21 captives.

The woman, who said she was being held with three others in the church aid group captured more than two weeks ago, said the captives were ill and finding it hard to survive.

"I don't want to die. We want to go home," she said in English in a telephone call set up by Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi.

"I don't know how long we can survive," she said.

One of her purported captors telephoned an AFP journalist from an unknown location and then handed the phone to the woman, who introduced herself with a Korean name that was not recognized.

There was no immediate way of verifying she was one of 23 South Korean church aid workers kidnapped in the southern province of Ghazni on July 19.

"Every day, it's really hard to survive. We really want to go home, we are all sick and weak," she said. "Please save us . . . we are all innocent people."

She appeared to ask that no military operation be conducted to free the group, saying: "Please no war. If there is a war we will be really in danger."

Speaking in Afghanistan's Dari language earlier, the woman said the group had been split up. "I don't know about the others, if they're alive," she said.

The Taliban has shot dead two hostages, both men, since the group was seized. It has warned more captives would be killed unless some of its fighters are released from jail, a demand that has been rejected.

The woman pleaded with the South Korean and Afghan governments, UN chief Ban Ki-moon and Pope Benedict XVI to help win their release.

The militants said after their latest deadline expired Wednesday they had not killed any more hostages because they were hoping for results from talks with South Korea.

Ahmadi said a Taliban delegation was ready to meet South Korean representatives face to face, in another country if necessary, if their safety was guaranteed.

Prentice expected to head defence portfolio

IDNUMBER 200708050018
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.08.05
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SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Jim Prentice;
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; BYELECTIONS
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 154

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

CTV News reported that sources say they expect Harper will put Calgary MP Jim Prentice, currently Indian Affairs minister, into Defence and move O'Connor to Veterans Affairs.

A shuffle this month would be Harper's second change to his cabinet since coming to power in 2006. His officials have told CanWest News that a shuffle won't elevate any backbenchers to the club; only existing ministers will be moved around.

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

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

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

Memorial service held for South Korean volunteer killed by Taliban

DATE: 2007.08.04

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL RELIGION DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 371

BUNDANG, South Korea (AP) _ Friends and relatives of a South Korean volunteer worker killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan packed a church memorial service Saturday where hundreds wept, sang hymns and prayed for 21 remaining hostages.

Shim Sung-min, 29, was killed Monday after being taken hostage with 22 other South Koreans in southern Afghanistan. They were kidnapped in Ghazni province on July 19 as they travelled by bus from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar.

“We can only hope for the safe return of the 21 other hostages to their country and families,” Sim Jin-pyo, his father, told hundreds gathered at a university hospital near the capital, Seoul. “He sacrificed himself to help others. Let us hope he can continue his work in heaven.”

Family members wept at his closed casket after joining in prayers also attended by politicians. His body will be donated for research.

Legislator Lee Geun-sik condemned the killing, saying “God will not forgive those responsible for this barbaric act.”

The Taliban, who also shot dead a pastor who headed the aid mission, has threatened to kill more hostages if their demand for the release of fighters held by the Afghan government are not met.

In Afghanistan, a venue was being sought in government territory where Taliban representatives could hold talks with a Korean delegation, possibly under United Nations supervision.

South Korea has sent diplomatic teams to Afghanistan and the United States, seen as a last hope in resolving the hostage crisis, hoping to persuade Washington to make an exception to its policy of non-negotiation with terrorists.

The Afghan government was internationally criticized for releasing five Taliban fighters in exchange for an Italian hostage earlier this year.

As the kidnapping crisis entered a third week, families of the captives appealed to the Afghan people for help in securing the release of their loved ones.

“If the children come home safely, we will communicate the painful situation of Afghan citizens to the world and help them to improve (it),” said Seo Jung-bae, whose daughter and son are among those being held.

Seoul's Islamic leaders visited the Saemmul Presbyterian church, where families of the captives have gathered, to express support.

“The frustrating thing is that because the people (Taliban) are not an Islamic organization, but a political one, we have no connection,” said Lee Haeng-rae, an imam at Seoul's Islamic Mosque. “For this reason we cannot

directly negotiate with them."

Record poppy crop in Afghanistan; U.S. drug-control efforts bog down

DATE: 2007.08.04

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 842

WASHINGTON (AP) _ Afghanistan will produce another record poppy harvest this year that cements its status as the world's near-sole supplier of the heroin source, yet a furious debate over how to reverse the trend is stalling proposals to cut the crop, U.S. officials say.

As U.S. President George W. Bush prepares for weekend talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, divisions within the U.S. administration and among NATO allies have delayed release of a US\$475 million counternarcotics program for Afghanistan, where intelligence officials see growing links between drugs and the Taliban, the officials said.

UN figures to be released in September are expected to show that Afghanistan's poppy production has risen up to 15 per cent since 2006 and that the country now accounts for 95 per cent of the world's crop, three percentage points more than last year, officials familiar with preliminary statistics told The Associated Press.

But counterdrug proposals by some U.S. officials have met fierce resistance, including boosting the amount of forcible poppy field destruction in provinces that grow the most, officials said. The approach also would link millions of dollars in development aid to benchmarks on eradication; arrests and prosecutions of narcotradgers, corrupt officials; and on alternative crop production.

Those ideas represent what proponents call an ``enhanced carrot-and-stick approach" to supplement existing anti-drug efforts. They are the focus of the new US\$475 million program outlined in a 995-page report, the release of which has been postponed twice and may be again delayed due to disagreements, officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because parts of the report remain classified.

Counternarcotics agents at the State Department had wanted to release a 123-page summary of the strategy last month and then again last week, but were forced to hold off because of concerns it may not be feasible, the officials said.

Now, even as Bush sees Karzai on Sunday and Monday at the presidential retreat in Camp David, Md., a tentative release date of Aug. 9, timed to follow the meetings, appears in jeopardy. Some in the administration, along with NATO allies Britain and Canada, seek revisions that could delay it until at least Aug. 13, the officials said.

The program represents a 13 per cent increase over the \$420 million in U.S. counternarcotics aid to Afghanistan last year. It would adopt a bold new approach to ``coercive eradication" and set out criteria for local officials to receive development assistance based on their cooperation, the officials said.

Although the existing aid, supplemented mainly by Britain and Canada and supported by the NATO force in Afghanistan, has achieved some results _ notably an expected rise in the number of ``poppy-free" provinces from six to at least 12 and possibly 16, mainly in the north _ production elsewhere has soared, they said.

“Afghanistan is providing close to 95 per cent of the world's heroin,” the State Department's top counternarcotics official, Tom Schweich, said at a recent conference. “That makes it almost a sole-source supplier” and presents a situation “unique in world history.”

Almost all the heroin from Afghanistan makes its way to Europe; most of the heroin in the U.S. comes from Latin America.

Afghanistan last year accounted for 92 per cent of global opium production, compared with 70 per cent in 2000 and 52 per cent a decade earlier. The higher yields in Afghanistan brought world production to a record high of 7,286 tonnes in 2006, 43 per cent more than in 2005.

A State Department inspector general's report released Friday noted that the counternarcotics assistance is dwarfed by the estimated \$38 billion “street value” of Afghanistan's poppy crop, if all is converted to heroin, and said eradication goals were “not realistic.”

Schweich, an advocate of the now-stalled plan, has argued for more vigorous eradication efforts, particularly in southern Helmand province, responsible for some 80 per cent of Afghanistan's poppy production. It is where, he says, growers must be punished for ignoring good-faith appeals to switch to alternative, but less lucrative, crops.

“They need to be dealt with in a more severe way,” he said at the conference sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “There needs to be a coercive element, that's something we're not going to back away from or shy away from.”

But, in fact, many question whether this is the right approach with Afghanistan mired in poverty and in the throes of an insurgency run by the Taliban and residual al-Qaida forces.

Along with Britain, whose troops patrol Helmand, elements in the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, the Defense Department and White House Office of National Drug Control Policy have expressed concern, saying that more raids will drive farmers with no other income to join extremists.

There is also skepticism about the incentives in the new strategy from those who believe development assistance should not be denied to local communities because of poppy growth, officials said.

Opponents argue that the benefits of such aid, new roads and other infrastructure, schools and hospitals, will themselves be powerful tools to combat the narcotrade once constructed.

One U.S. official said the plan was a good one but might take another year or two before it can be effectively introduced.

Suicide car bomb attack kills 2 civilians in southern Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.08.04
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 289

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) _ A suicide car bomber blew himself up next to a convoy of foreign troops Saturday just west of Kandahar city, killing two civilians who were nearby, Afghan police said. There were no casualties among the troops.

The suicide bomb attack, which left four other civilians wounded, damaged three shops in the area, said Rehmatullah Khan, chief of criminal investigations for the Kandahar police.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force said that it was aware of the explosion and has responded to the scene. There were no immediate reports of casualties, ISAF said, noting that it was awaiting further information.

Most of Canada's more than two-thousand troops in Afghanistan are in Kandahar province.

But a Canadian military spokesman in Kandahar said there were no Canadian troops or vehicles in this convoy.

The spokesman for Afghanistan's Defence Ministry, providing further detail on a previously announced attack, said he believed more than 100 Taliban fighters were killed during air strikes in northern Helmand province on Thursday.

The strike targeted a gathering of militant leaders, including the Taliban's southern commander, Mullah Dadullah Mansoor, said the spokesman, Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi.

Azimi said five militant commanders were killed, but that it was not yet known whether Mansoor survived. He said Afghan and coalition troops were investigating at the attack site.

Azimi denied that any civilians were injured or killed, saying that the men there were all militants who will claim to be civilians by throwing their weapons down. He said no women or children were hurt or killed, though a provincial health official in Helmand on Friday said an 8-year-old boy had been wounded.

Afghan and foreign troops in the country have repeatedly tried to kill senior militant leaders, while trying to co-opt the low level fighters in their drive to expand government control in the country's volatile south and east.

Afghan-Cda-Soldiers

DATE: 2007.08.04
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 139

SHAWALI KOT, Afghanistan — A Canadian soldier says he couldn't believe what he was hearing during a conversation he had before he left Quebec for Afghanistan.

Private Francis Archambault says he was told by ``somebody who's educated, who has diplomas galore" that ``there would be no war in the world" if people like him didn't exist.

Archambault says it shocked him ``to hear that from someone who should know better."

Archambault and other Quebec-based soldiers in Afghanistan are expressing frustration with the widespread opposition in their home province to Canada's military mission in the country.

One poll suggests 70 per cent of Quebecers are opposed to the continued presence of Canadian soldiers in the war-torn land.

Archambault says people who are against the mission are misguided when they accuse Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives of wanting to endorse U-S foreign policy just to stay in the good books of the Bush administration.

(CP)

bjk

Afghan–Violence

DATE: 2007.08.04

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 61

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — A suicide car bomber blew himself up next to a convoy of foreign troops today just west of Kandahar city, killing two civilians who were nearby.

Afghan police say there were no casualties among the troops.

The suicide bomb attack, which left four other civilians wounded, damaged three shops in the area.

NATO says it was aware of the explosion and has responded to the scene.

Most of Canada's troops in Afghanistan are based in the Kandahar–area.

(AP)

SAF

Confront roots of terrorism, not just the symptoms

IDNUMBER 200708050029
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A19
BYLINE: Haroon Siddiqui
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 594

Terrorism by Muslims is real. It cannot be wished away. The only debate is how best to tackle it.

The War on Terror has vastly increased terrorism, empowered radicals, strained America's relations with much of the world, and diluted our own democracies.

Many intelligence services, think–tanks and an increasing number of governments now see a clear link between the terrorism and the wars in Iraq, the Israeli Occupied Territories, Afghanistan, etc.

Those who disagree ask: What about Muslim–on–Muslim violence? After all, Muslims are the biggest victims of terrorism. Sunnis and Shiites are killing each other. So are supporters of the Islamist Hamas and the secular but mostly Muslim Fatah.

And what of "Islamic terrorism," "Islamist extremism," "radical Islamism," etc.? Al Qaeda does exist, as does Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. So do dozens of other violent groups. They wage jihad against the U.S., Israel and Western allies, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan.

Some imams spout hate for Christians and Jews from the pulpit. Neither the militant groups nor such imams can be ignored and, in fact, are not. Still, we must ask:

Why have such outfits and individuals emerged in recent years? Why do they find traction? And why is intra–Muslim violence mostly confined to occupied or wartorn lands? Two answers are given.

Violence is part of the genetic makeup of Muslims.

Or we are seeing the blowback of contemporary geopolitics – the U.S. backing of Islamic jihadists in Soviet–occupied Afghanistan, the drawn–out Arab–Israeli dispute, the two Gulf wars, the economic sanctions, the ever–present politics of oil, and the widely perceived American double standards.

Every month in Iraq has been a 9/11, every day a 7/7. In Afghanistan, too, there is no peace.

While collateral damage caused by coalition forces is far less now than locals killing locals, there's no escaping responsibility for the civil wars amid the ruins of the physical and social infrastructures.

The British newspaper the Guardian urges Gordon Brown to "acknowledge Britain's role in creating, unintentionally, the conditions for instability, civil wars and mayhem ... Such an approach would not extirpate

the terrorist cause in Britain but it would be a start in altering the conditions in which terrorists recruit."

Britain has uncovered 15 terrorist plots since 2001. Some of the plotters have been found guilty. Another 100 await trials.

The convicted were engineers, doctors, gangsters, thieves, drug users; most were born Muslim and others are Christian converts; some are religious and others not.

Most did not come from faraway caves or madrassas but British schools, universities, taverns and cricket and soccer fields. They were angry about the British involvement in Iraq and also identified with global Muslim grievances.

They turned violent at the behest of militant imams, or Al Qaeda or just watching TV or perusing jihadist websites.

Canada is not immune to potential homegrown terrorism, as seen in the 2003 arrest of 22 Muslims and the 2006 arrest of 18 more.

"We need to resolve the conditions and conflicts which create this irrational behaviour," Paul Cavalluzzo, lead counsel to the Maher Arar inquiry, said in an interview.

Equally, the fact that all terrorism-related charges in the 2003 case were dropped, as were charges against three of the 18, suggests that when police and security officials nail suspects, "they should be showing less adrenalin and more sensitivity to due process and people's rights," he said. "Once you're labelled a terrorist, it's a difficult label to remove for the rest of your life – like being called a Communist in the McCarthy era."

Let's wage war against Al Qaeda. Keep an eye on the peddlers of hate. Initiate early warning systems to detect the radicalization of the young. Crack down on suspected criminals and prosecute them in speedy, transparent trials.

But doing all that while ignoring the conflicts that create the rage is to just treat the symptoms of the disease.

Happily, there are signs that this process is now underway.

Haroon Siddiqui, the Star's editorial page editor emeritus, appears Thursday in World and Sunday in the A-section. Email: [hsiddiq @ thestar.ca](mailto:hsiddiq@thestar.ca)

Opposition leader released; Main foe of Pakistan's Musharraf freed on bail by Supreme Court, vows to wrest power from 'those generals'

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PUBLICATION:	The Toronto Star
DATE:	2007.08.05
EDITION:	Ont
SECTION:	News
PAGE:	A13
ILLUSTRATION:	ARIF ALI AFP Getty Images Supporters greet Javed Hashmi, a senior Pakistani opposition leader, as he leaves prison on bail yesterday. ;
BYLINE:	ZIA KHAN
SOURCE:	Associated Press
COPYRIGHT:	© 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT:	533

One of Pakistan's most outspoken opposition leaders emerged from prison to a cheering crowd yesterday vowing to press his campaign against President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who is already struggling with rising dissent and militant violence.

Attacks and clashes killed 23 people in the northern tribal regions, where pro-Taliban militants have been waging a campaign against Musharraf's government, a key U.S. ally in the fight against terrorism.

The combination of militant violence and political demands for the restoration of democracy have embroiled Musharraf in the toughest period of his rule since he ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup eight years ago.

Almost certain to add to his troubles was the release of Javed Hashmi, the acting president of the exiled former prime minister's party.

The Supreme Court granted Hashmi bail Friday after he served four years of a 23-year sentence on charges of treason and inciting an army mutiny against Musharraf. Hashmi will be free while the court considers whether it should review his case, which rights and opposition groups have criticized as politically motivated.

Hundreds of members of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N gathered outside the prison, some with drums and horns. As Hashmi emerged, they rushed forward, waving the green flags of Sharif's party and chanting: "Brave man, Hashmi, Hashmi!"

"My fight was for the restoration of democracy, and the true freedom for me will come the day when we will get rid of those generals who toppled the elected government," Hashmi said.

"There will be no compromise with the dictators," he said. "I will only consider myself a free man when the entire nation will get freedom from these generals."

One of the jurists who released Hashmi was Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, whom Musharraf tried and failed to unseat in what opponents called an attempt to remove a potentially powerful opponent who could have derailed the president's push for a new five-year term.

Opposition leader released; Main foe of Pakistan's Musharraf freed on bail by Supreme Court, vows to wrest

Draped in a flower garland, Hashmi climbed onto the front of a four-wheel-drive vehicle to lead a procession to a shrine through the streets of Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city and its cultural capital.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N is one of the main groups on Pakistan's fractured political scene, and the former prime minister remains its powerful figurehead. It had been in an anti-Musharraf alliance with the party of another exiled former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, until last month, when speculation intensified about a deal between Bhutto and Musharraf.

Sharif appealed to the Supreme Court on Thursday to be allowed to return from exile to contest parliamentary elections later this year. Musharraf has said he would block any such attempt.

In the North West Frontier Province, violence continued unabated as a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb at a busy bus station in the town of Parachinar, killing nine people and wounding 35, police official Mohammed Kamal said.

In the nearby tribal region of North Waziristan, pro-Taliban militants assaulted a security checkpoint in Oblanki, triggering a shootout that killed four soldiers and 10 militants, said army spokesperson Maj. Gen. Waheed Arshad. Five other soldiers were wounded.

The security situation in Pakistan, especially in the tribal zone bordering Afghanistan, has been deteriorating for weeks, and almost daily attacks have killed more than 350 people in that time.

The U.S. is demanding tougher action against Al Qaeda sanctuaries along the Afghan border, and some American officials have raised the prospects of unilateral strikes.

Debate stalls action on poppy issue

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PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 8
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 195

Afghanistan will produce another record poppy harvest this year that cements its status as the world's near-sole supplier of the heroin source, yet a furious debate over how to reverse the trend is stalling proposals to cut the crop, U.S. officials say.

As U.S. President George W. Bush prepares for weekend talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, divisions within the U.S. administration and among NATO allies have delayed release of a US\$475 million counternarcotics program for Afghanistan, where intelligence officials see growing links between drugs and the Taliban, the officials said.

UN figures to be released in September are expected to show that Afghanistan's poppy production has risen up to 15% since 2006 and that the country now accounts for 95% of the world's crop, three percentage points more than last year, officials familiar with preliminary statistics told The Associated Press.

But counterdrug proposals by some U.S. officials have met fierce resistance, including boosting the amount of forcible poppy field destruction, officials said. The approach also would link millions of dollars in development aid to benchmarks on eradication.

Those ideas represent what proponents call an "enhanced carrot-and-stick approach" to supplement existing anti-drug efforts. KEYWORDS=WORLD

War on Afghan poppies hits wall

SOURCETAG 0708050235
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 29
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 215

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As U.S. President George W. Bush prepares for weekend talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, divisions within the U.S. administration and among NATO allies have delayed release of a \$475 million US counternarcotics program for Afghanistan, where intelligence officials see growing links between drugs and the Taliban, the officials said.

HEALTHY CROP

UN figures to be released in September are expected to show that Afghanistan's poppy production has risen up to 15% since 2006 and that the country now accounts for 95% of the world's crop, 3% more than the past year.

But counterdrug proposals have met fierce resistance, including boosting the amount of forcible poppy field destruction in provinces that grow the most. The approach also would link millions of dollars in development aid to benchmarks on eradication; arrests and prosecutions of narcotradars, corrupt officials; and on alternative crop production.

They are the focus of the new program outlined in a 995-page report, the release of which has been postponed twice due to disagreements.

The U.S., along with NATO allies Britain and Canada, seek revisions that could delay it until at least Aug. 13.
KEYWORDS=WORLD

Record Afghan poppy crop

SOURCETAG 0708050595
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DATE: 2007.08.05
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SECTION: News
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BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 203

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KEYWORDS=WORLD

Letters to the Editor Column

SOURCETAG 0708050590
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 16
COLUMN: Letters to the Editor
WORD COUNT: 713

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

What's wrong with being patriotic? I would rather wrap myself in my flag and be a proud Canadian and support our troops than be a cynic who can't see the good it does for the families at home. I have many friends in the military and lost a friend in Afghanistan. I don't think there's enough flag-wrapping patriotism! Pick up a decal or a magnet and proudly show that you not only support the freedom our military is trying to provide but that you are a proud Canadian.

Brian Petersen

(The Petersen challenge.)

I can't understand how some people can possibly not support our troops when our brave young men and women stand on guard for Canada. Our troops deserve nothing less than the absolute best. I salute Canada's Armed Forces. You people need to know we more than appreciate your efforts!

P.J. Parent

(They deserve support.)

Re: Bill Kaufmann's Friday article about the cougar attack in B.C. Mark Patterson, who saved the boy, said that people are calling him a hero, adding he thought soldiers were heroes. Well, Mark, as a soldier with 19 years in the Canadian Forces and five tours overseas, I am honoured to call you a hero. Not only did you help, you put yourself in harm's way. A boy and his family have you to thank.

Lanny Hill

Warrant Officer

(It was remarkably brave.)

Canada's health system is strained beyond capacity. Bring in user fees. Maybe if people had two or three visits per year (chronically ill and low-income people exempt from fees), they wouldn't be running to the doctor for every headache or snuffle. People would realize how much they need a doctor when it starts costing them to abuse the system.

Troy Gunderson

(There is no quick fix.)

I liken the condition of Pigeon Lake to the poor-quality leadership this province has experienced through the de-Klein era. The spring runoff and excellent rain we received this year should have not only raised the shrinking level of Pigeon Lake, it should have made it a banner year for water sports. But that didn't happen. Instead, algae is growing and fish and ducks are washing up to shore – dead. Why? Because the provincial environment ministry is asleep at the wheel.

L.G. Anderson

(Sounds yucky.)

Re: Thursday letter by Rarihokwats. The Indian Act wasn't meant to last forever. If some choose to stay in the bush and not go to school, why should the government continue to support this when they choose not to learn how to cope in today's changing world? It is easier for them to blame someone else for their problems. That is why I fear for my life if the government ever granted First Nations sovereignty to govern themselves. We are not ready for it! I am quite content here with the choice I made to live among the "white" folks.

Clint Morin

(This'll bring letters.)

Just as Kim Campbell took the fall for Brian MulRUINny, Ed Stelmach is going to take it for Genghis Klein. Too bad. For a conservative, he actually seems like a decent man – something rare.

Jim Orfino

(Orfino's oracle?)

Now that B.C. can't prosecute those breakaway Mormons in Bountiful for having 40 wives, this tells me it's OK for guys to have a harem. I am of Viking descent and I believe we had scores of women 500 years ago. It is my right to pillage the villages looking for girls. I will have to ask my wife first though.

Gene Nicholson

(Let us know what she thinks.)

Re: brewery closure. Isn't it sad that the union leaders did not have the foresight to know this plant was on its last legs? Rather than dreaming up demands, they should have been coming to the employer with ideas for improving plant efficiencies. Get with it, union leadership. You are out of touch with reality and have caused 100-plus souls to lose well-paying jobs.

Bob Pella

(Lots of blame to go around.)

Re: Dave Fagnant's Aug. 1 letter about Telus. It does no good to call the public relations department. I have been having problems with Telus for the past month. Everyone tells you a different story or gives you the runaround. They promised on two occasions to install Telus TV and never showed up. I have been without TV or Internet for over a month. I am now going with Shaw.

Diane McLeod

(At least there's a choice.)

Sunday Letters Column

SOURCETAG 0708050493
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 25
COLUMN: Sunday Letters
WORD COUNT: 1136

FEUD MUST END

How unprofessional of Edmonton Councillor Mike Nickel ("The devil lives in Calgary," July 27). Saying that may have just extended this feud. In my completely unbiased judgment (as unbiased as it can be from an angry 16-year-old Calgarian) this is a better city. There is more to do and the skyline is prettier. There is one way we can stop this. Alberta should start a poll asking which city is better overall. These two cities should not be fighting like this. This needs to end. Does anyone even remember why were fighting?

TANNER CORCORAN

(It's a rivalry that should not be taken too seriously.)

TRIVIAL PURSUIT

I am disappointed that you would print a letter as trivial and outrageous as "Abandon Toronto" (July 30) and then add a positive "Bull's eye!" comment.

LUCI DEAN

(The letter was written tongue-in-cheek.)

weir attitude

While i agree with letter writer Kristen Dietrich In that construction of a water park at the bow river weir is ridiculous, i wouldn't call the weir a drowning machine! I'd wager there hasn't been more than one or two legitimate drowning "accidents" on the weir in 50 years! When supposedly intelligent people choose to ignore fast/high water warnings, booms, or go without life-jackets, there can be no sympathy for whatever happen to them! in fact, they should be paying for their rescue or recovery! this money would be better spent on housing for the working poor and homeless than on recreation parks.

MARTY KNELLER

(The importance of recreation shouldn't be underestimated.)

MAYOR MISSES MEANING

Mayor Dave Bronconnier should go to Afghanistan and visit our troops to truly understand the mission that Canada is facing, not the political mission, but the mission our troops fight everyday while overseas. As a veteran of this great country (as is my youngest brother), I am appalled to witness the political fiasco and

ashamed of our elected mayor for losing sight of what the Support Our Troops ribbon means.

C. J. WALLACE (RETIRED)

(The symbolic support means a great deal to many people.)

SON SHIPPING OUT

My son is a soldier in the Canadian Army. He is due to be called to Afghanistan before the end of this year. If Mayor Bronconnier has a good reason why he feels yellow ribbon bumper stickers should not be used to support my son, then I challenge him to tell me why to my face.

DOREEN LESKO

(The mayor says financial support for military families is more important.)

SICK OF STICKER FLAP

I do not understand the ongoing debate over whether, governments and civic leaders should declare support for our troops in Afghanistan. Why is this continuing day after day? Sure I support the troops, just like I support the police, firefighters and EMS. The troops are doing a job. If they do not like the job, they should quit. If they are swayed by endless debate back home then they should probably quit because they are a danger to fellow soldiers. The soldiers are not being forced to fight and die in Afghanistan, so they do not need a decal. Where are the "Support our Convenience Store Workers" decals for those who put their lives on the line just to sell Doritos to drunks? Canadians have died so others can have their snacks at 3 a.m., yet to the vast majority of Canadians it is an occupational hazard — just like being a soldier. Buy a decal or shut up and do whatever job you do in Canada.

JOHN KRAT

(Surely you jest.)

ADVICE SERVED UP

As an out-of-town visitor to Calgary, I had a wonderful time but I did seem to have an ongoing problem everywhere I went. I asked for little things from the hotel and restaurants like substitutions or whatever extras I needed. I received them right away and then received the extras added on to my bill later on. Of course after the fact I had no choice but to pay them and then tell myself I will not be going back to some of the places. Please, if you work in hotels, restaurants or what have you, please let customers know it's an added expense instead of smiling like you are doing me some kind of favour.

H. MATHe

(A reasonable expectation.)

EDMONTON REFRESHING

After living in Calgary for 27 years, I figured it was time to visit the provincial capital. If what I saw on the weekend is an indication of how Edmonton is, Calgary has a ways to catch up. I found a city with character — city with ups and downs instead of looking as though it was built by a geometrician. A city with beautiful trees everywhere. The streets are wider than Calgary's. Traffic is not as chaotic. Some of the downtown areas were dirty but it was OK. It was nice to see functional old buildings downtown unlike Calgary. There were

flowers everywhere. We received excellent service everywhere, quite the opposite of what I see every day here. How refreshing.

FALI MORENO

(You know what they say about how the grass is always greener ...)

CONTROL CRIME NOT GUNS

Canadians are tired of politicians calling for more and more gun control when what Canada needs in crime control. The politicians calling for these bans would prefer to remove legally owned property from good citizens than lock a career criminal in jail. How many more innocent children will the politicians allow to die before they understand that gun control is not crime control?

PIERRE DUPONT

(They seem to believe kindness will cure criminals.)

Pastor hounded

Alberta used to be a stand-up province that didn't tolerate nonsense. Now, the Alberta government, through a government-appointed kangaroo court, laughingly called the human rights tribunal, harasses Red Deer pastor Stephen Boisson for a letter he wrote to a hicktown newspaper. In his letter, he took teachers and counsellors who promoted homosexual behaviour to task for helping to spread STDs, AIDS and self-destructive behaviour. The truth of his letter is self-evident to anyone with a modicum of honesty. Regardless, the letter was his opinion and he has every right to state it. Apparently not in Alberta, where only potty mouth tirades, vulgar speech and art and Holocaust deniers are afforded free speech. Make the point that rampant, out-of-marriage sex, especially homosexual sex, is destructive and somehow you have violated human rights and tax dollars are expended to hound you down.

BARRY BANEK

(Free speech is of paramount importance.)

WATER WORRIES

If government is really sincere about monitoring our water consumption, it will have to take a brutal stand. I resent the huge influx of people coming here and causing our electricity suppliers to raise the price because of demand. We have to pay and we are going to have to pay for water since it will go up in price for the same reasons. Plans for new highrises and restaurants in the east part of the city are grandiose. Many people will become rich but where is the water coming from?

JOHN E. MYLES

(We can do more to conserve water.)

Poppy harvest record for Afghans Accounts for 95% of world's heroin source

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.05
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SECTION: News
PAGE: 17
ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI Heading into talks
BYLINE: AP AND REUTERS
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 225

Afghanistan will produce another record poppy harvest this year that cements its status as the world's near-sole supplier of the heroin source.

Yet a furious debate over how to reverse the trend is stalling proposals to cut the crop, U.S. officials say.

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The approach would link millions of dollars in aid to benchmarks on eradication; arrests and prosecutions of narcotic traders, corrupt officials and on alternative crop production.

Those ideas represent what proponents call an "enhanced carrot-and-stick approach" to supplement existing anti-drug efforts.

They are the focus of the new US\$475 million program outlined in a 995-page report, the release of which has been postponed twice and may be again delayed due to disagreements, officials said.

IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

– The Afghan government and Taliban kidnappers yesterday sought a place to negotiate to try to free 21 South Korean Christian hostages held for more than two weeks.

A South Korean delegation is in the province where the church volunteers were snatched, seeking direct talks with the kidnappers.

– Military officials say there were no Canadian troops in a convoy attacked by a suicide bomber just west of Kandahar.

The attack killed two civilians, but no troops, and injured four other civilians. KEYWORDS=WORLD

War's end in sight, Afghan governor says; Fellow leader accuses Pakistan of holding South Koreans hostage

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen; with files from Reuters and AgenceFrance–Presse
WORD COUNT: 557

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The NATO–led coalition is winning the war in Afghanistan and the end of the conflict is "not very far" away, the governor of Kandahar province said yesterday, even as a suicide bomber killed two civilians in the province's capital.

Police said the attacker drove a vehicle close to a convoy of coalition troops and detonated the bomb. Four other civilians were injured.

The attack took place on a road used by coalition forces to reach the western Panjwaii and Zhari districts of the province, as well as neighbouring Helmand province.

Canadian military officials said no Canadians were in the convoy.

But Asadullah Khalid, Kandahar's governor, said the province's security is improving "day by day."

"Last year in Kandahar at the same time, we had three suicide attacks per day," said Mr. Khalid in an interview with CanWest News Service. "We cannot say that tomorrow all terrorist activity will stop. ... But in general, the security situation is good in Kandahar and it is getting better day by day."

He even suggested the day is drawing near when Canadian troops can hand over security responsibilities to the Afghan army and police force.

"We need them until the end of this war," Mr. Khalid said of the Canadian military. "But the end of this war is not very far."

He conceded that some areas of the province are still "hostage" to Taliban influence. But he said the province, aided by Canadian military support and aid money, has been pushing forward with a number of reconstruction projects, such as the rebuilding of a dam that supplies water to seven districts. "If you saw where we were five years ago and where we are today, you will see a big difference."

This month, the province announced 72 reconstruction projects, including the construction of schools, mosques and irrigation systems.

Mr. Khalid said reforms of the Afghan National Police, widely viewed as corrupt and susceptible to Taliban infiltration, are coming along.

"We started to rebuild the army four years ago, and the police are four years behind, but the police are getting better."

Canadian troops have been engaged in less toe-to-toe fighting with the Taliban than they were last summer, but suicide attacks and roadside bombs remain a persistent threat.

Last month, a roadside bomb killed six Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter travelling in a convoy about 20 kilometres southwest of Kandahar City.

Meanwhile, the governor of Ghazni province, where 23 South Koreans were taken hostage more than two weeks ago, accused Pakistani Taliban working with Pakistani intelligence agents of holding them captive.

"In the beginning it was the local Taliban, but after a few days, Pakistani Taliban and ISI officers disguised as Taliban arrived in the region and they took control of the situation," Gov. Merajuddin Pattan told Reuters in an interview yesterday.

Afghan officials often accuse neighbouring Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of secretly supporting and harbouring Taliban insurgents. Pakistan strongly denies the charge.

Pakistani officials were not immediately available for comment on Mr. Pattan's accusation, which could spark another downturn in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, both frontline allies of the United States.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is due to arrive in the U.S. for talks today and tomorrow with President George W. Bush.

Mr. Pattan's allegations come as a purported South Korean hostage made an emotional plea for help in a telephone call with AFP as a negotiator again ruled out freeing Taliban prisoners in exchange for the 21 surviving captives.

The woman, who said she was being held with three others in the church aid group, said the captives were ill and finding it hard to survive.

"I don't want to die. We want to go home," she said in English in a call set up by Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi. "I don't know how long we can survive."

There was no immediate way of verifying that she was one of South Koreans kidnapped on July 19.

Quotes of the week

IDNUMBER 200708050007
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A2
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Drew Carey; Photo: Barry Bonds ; Photo: Sarah Miles ; Photo: Tom Lantos ; Photo: Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie ;
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 143

'You have to lead from the front so you understand what your soldiers are going through.'

Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie of Stittsville, who will be receiving the Meritorious Service Cross for his actions in Afghanistan.

'There is no real good reason to let this needless slaughter continue, and every reason to put it to a stop.'

No, he's not talking about Darfur.

U.S. Democrat Tom Lantos supports the U.S. House of Representatives resolution demanding that Canada end the hunting of baby seals.

'He just whispered to me, "Sarah, eet is for ze critics!"'

Actress Sarah Miles, who starred in Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 classic Blowup, on asking the director to explain a famous scene in which a white-faced group play an invisible game of tennis with non-existent rackets and balls. Antonioni died Monday at age 94.

'I'm 43, not 23.

Now, do you understand?'

San Francisco Giants super-slugger Barry Bonds demanding a slightly lighter Sam Bat from his Ottawa supplier.

'It had to fit my principles: fun, easy to do, not work ... All I'm doing is giving away prizes. And it's not even my money.'

Drew Carey on becoming the new host of The Price is Right.

End to war is close – Kandahar governor

IDNUMBER 200708050005
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.05
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: BARRY DONNELLY, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE / AsadullahKhalid, governor of Kandahar province, says the end of the war in Afghanistan is "not very far" away. ;
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: ANDREW MAYEDA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service; Reuters contributed to this report
WORD COUNT: 534

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The NATO–led coalition is winning the war in Afghanistan and the end of the conflict is "not very far" away, the governor of Kandahar province said yesterday, even as a suicide car bomb killed two civilians in the province's capital.

Police said the attacker drove close to a convoy of coalition troops and detonated the bomb. Four other civilians were injured.

The attack took place on a road used by coalition forces to reach the western Panjwahi and Zhari districts of the province, as well as neighbouring Helmand province.

Canadian military officials said no Canadians were in the convoy, but would not say which country the troops were from.

But Asadullah Khalid, Kandahar's governor, said the province's security is improving "day by day."

"Last year in Kandahar at the same time we had three suicide attacks per day," said Khalid in an interview with CanWest News Service.

"We cannot say that tomorrow all terrorist activity will stop. ... But in general, the security situation is good in Kandahar and it is getting better day by day."

He even suggested the day is drawing near when Canadian troops can hand over security responsibilities to the Afghan army and police force.

"We need them until the end of this war," Khalid said of the Canadian military. "But the end of this war is not very far."

The governor's comments come at a time of considerable debate over the success of coalition operations in southern Afghanistan, as well as the need for Canadian troops to play a leading combat role.

Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor recently said Canadian troops could be pulled back from the front lines more quickly than expected as the military ramps up training of Afghan soldiers.

But Canada's top soldier, General Rick Hillier, says it will be a "long while" before the army is ready to take control.

Opinion on the Afghan side has also been split. Kandahar's new police chief and a federal minister in charge of rural rehabilitation recently urged Canadian troops to stay beyond February 2009, the withdrawal date set by the Canadian government.

Khalid conceded some areas of the province are still "hostage" to Taliban influence.

But he said the province, helped by Canadian military support and aid money, has been pushing forward with a number of reconstruction projects, like the rebuilding of a dam that supplies water to seven districts.

"If you saw where we were five years ago and where we are today, you will see a big difference," the governor said.

This month, the province announced 72 reconstruction projects, including the construction of schools, mosques and irrigation systems.

Khalid said reforms of the Afghan National Police, widely viewed as corrupt and susceptible to Taliban infiltration, are coming along.

"We started to rebuild the army four years ago, and the police are four years behind, but the police are getting better."

Canadian troops have been engaged in less toe-to-toe fighting with the Taliban than last summer, but suicide attacks and roadside bombs remain a persistent threat.

Last month, a roadside bomb killed six Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter travelling in a convoy about 20 kilometres southwest of Kandahar City.

Military commanders said the bomb, which ripped through a heavily armoured RG-31 Nyala vehicle, was the biggest they had ever seen.

Meeting place sought: The Afghan government and Taliban kidnappers sought a venue yesterday for negotiations to try to free 21 South Korean Christian hostages held for more than two weeks, the provincial police chief said.

There has been a buildup of Afghan forces in Ghazni since the hostages were hauled off a bus on the main road south from Kabul on July 20.

The Taliban want to hold talks in an area they control, and vouched for the safety of the South Korean delegates. Otherwise, the insurgents say, they need UN security guarantees should the South Koreans want negotiations to take place outside Taliban-controlled areas.

Ottawa Citizen