

## KANDAHAR JAILBREAK

# Afghan forces should have secured prison, MacKay says

But documents show Canada had been asked for help with problems at Sarpoza

STEVEN CHASE

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OTTAWA -- Defence Minister Peter MacKay tried to distance Canada from blame in the Kandahar jailbreak that freed hundreds of prisoners - including 400 pro-Taliban insurgents - saying the Afghan government must answer for failing to prevent it.

"Let's not forget this is an Afghan lead. It's not a Canadian-run prison," Mr. MacKay told CTV's *Question Period*, adding later that the Afghans "have obviously a lot to account for as to what happened."

Critics called Friday's incident a major setback for security in the Kandahar province, and as such, a defeat for Canadian forces because Kandahar is Canada's area of responsibility in the NATO-led mission. The prison is a key military target for Taliban and deserved better protection, they said.

The breakout is also raising questions about how realistic Canada's plan is for Canadian soldiers to quit Afghanistan in 2011 and hand responsibility for security to Afghan forces.

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University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran said the tragedy is that the breakout freed prisoners apprehended at great cost.

"Canadian lives were lost picking up these prisoners in the first place. Presumably, more will be lost re-arresting them. How much sadder an outcome can you have?"

Mr. MacKay, however, tried to shift the focus to Afghan players, noting "the prison officials are going to be questioned ... the warden himself will be questioned and there will be a lot of follow-up."

Mr. MacKay's remarks left the impression that coalition forces suspect Taliban who orchestrated the prison break may have been assisted by jail staff - but he stopped short of suggesting the breakout was an inside job.

Mr. MacKay also defended Canada's decision not to set up its own prison for combatants captured by coalition forces, saying the goal is to train Afghans to run their own affairs.

"This was a prison that we believed was secure and clearly that's not the case," he said.

But documents Prof. Attaran obtained through litigation at Federal Court show Canada was aware of deficiencies at Sarpoza Prison, the site of the breakout, and had been asked by Afghans as recently as 2007 to help improve it.

"Our initial tour indicates a need of basic infrastructure development and refurbishment," a Correctional Service of Canada report in 2007 said.

"It has been recommended that our first priority be on securing the perimeter of the institution," the report said.

Security expert Wesley Wark said the incident represents an intelligence failure for Canadians and other International Security Assistance Force members in Kandahar.

"I think it's an embarrassment for ISAF and for the Canadian presence ... that this was able to be planned and mounted as an operation without any prior warning."

He said the incident shows that the plan for Canadian soldiers to quit the Afghan mission in 2011 doesn't really fit with "strategic reality."