

Table of Contents

NATO countries are failing their duty in Afghanistan.....1

NATO countries are failing their duty in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200708130038
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.13
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
COLUMN: Lewis Mackenzie
ILLUSTRATION: Graphic/Diagram: (See hard copy for graphic.);
BYLINE: Lewis Mackenzie
SOURCE: Citizen Special
WORD COUNT: 537

It's good to see the United States, Britain and Canada starting to focus on the shortage of NATO "boots on the ground" in Afghanistan, particularly in the volatile southern part of the country. It has been obvious to anyone with a modicum of operational experience that this was the case shortly after the U.S. had to divide its resources between Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003.

With NATO taking a leading role in Afghanistan, it was assumed that Article 5 of the alliance's charter that states that an attack against one is to be considered as an attack against all would result in a traffic jam of NATO troops as they deployed in the direction of the threat. Four years later, politically constrained military commanders on the ground are "requesting" the Alliance's civilian leadership find them 2,500 more troops to secure the south of the country.

You don't tippy-toe in incremental steps in search of victory. Another 2,500 troops in the south would ease the burden of those, including our Canadians, bearing the brunt of the fighting. But it won't guarantee victory. If we want to win this fight, pacify the south and leave with a clear conscience, the alliance should send at least an additional 10,000 combat troops to that front.

Where to find the soldiers is the easy part, as the accompanying chart will show. Convincing the political leadership in the countries with the soldiers but not the will is a job for those who have earned the right to address the problem, and that includes Canada.

The chart shows both NATO and non-NATO countries currently serving as part of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The numbers are not absolutely precise due to the constantly changing nature of military strengths. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest whole. They do, however, give a pretty good idea of which countries are taking the mission seriously and which aren't.

Some countries do not break down their reserve numbers into navy, army and air force so I included their totals, as armies always make up the majority of any reserve force. The percentages I show are based on the size of each country's regular army only.

In the case of Canada I acknowledged the contribution of our air force and navy personnel in Afghanistan by reducing the size of our contingent there from 2,600 Canadian Forces personnel to 2,000 army.

Recent announcements indicate that Canada hopes to have 3,000 to 5,000 Afghan troops trained by the end of the year and that they will be able to conduct combat operations on their own. That is all well and good but it will not ensure victory, particularly with Taliban reinforcements readily available across the border in

Pakistan and having easy access to unguarded border crossing points into Afghanistan.

If you add up the total regular army troops available to NATO, it comes to roughly 2.24 million soldiers. All we need in Afghanistan to reinforce the troops currently in theatre and win this thing is half of one per cent of that figure.

Where the hell are they?

Retired Canadian general Lewis MacKenzie was the first commander of the United Nations' Sector Sarajevo during the Bosnia civil war.