

Prison break highlights intelligence shortfall, Manley says

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OTTAWA — The man whose recommendations led Canada to extend its mission in Afghanistan blamed woeful military intelligence-gathering Sunday for the devastating prison break that freed hundreds of Taliban insurgents.

“[I’m] very dismayed,” John Manley told the CTV current affairs program *Question Period* Sunday.

“What it really speaks to is a breakdown in our intelligence. Getting information on something like that is really something we should be able to obtain.”

Mr. Manley's remarks reflect those of acting foreign affairs minister David Emerson, who said recently that Canadian intelligence in the province needs to improve. The government is investigating the incident.

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Mr. Manley said fighting an insurgency, as the Canadians are doing in Kandahar, means that it is critical to have an advanced intelligence-gathering capability, particularly when troops aren't meeting face to face on the battlefield in traditional combat.

“What you really are thriving on is getting information,” he said. “You've got to be able to stop things before they happen, so it's a breakdown in intelligence.”

It was Mr. Manley's panel that issued critical recommendations that Canada seek the involvement of 1,000 more foreign soldiers before agreeing to extend its tour in Afghanistan by another two years.

A former foreign affairs minister himself, Mr. Manley said the incident also demonstrates that the Taliban are capable of significant military actions. Some experts have described the prison break as a strategic and psychological blow.

Nonetheless, Mr. Manley, who has criticized the government for not fully communicating the goals and results of the mission, complimented Prime Minister Stephen Harper for being candid in characterizing the break as a setback for Canada's plan to turn over security to Afghan forces three years from now.

“I'd have to say that the Prime Minister handled that quite well. He was very forthcoming in saying, essentially, this is a very bad thing that happened,” he said. “I'm not sure all of the spokesmen for the government were quite as forthcoming.”

Canadians will only back their soldiers' presence in Afghanistan if they're satisfied they're being told the truth.

He also said that, on two visits to Germany to discuss the war with members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Mr. Manley came away with a fear that the obstacles in the country are not being taken seriously.

“Absolutely NATO could fail,” he said. “And the consequences for NATO failing could be very serious for NATO itself.”

He said the military commitment from the alliance is not high enough, noting that the 50,000-troop commitment to Afghanistan – a country of 30 million – is the same as the numbers sent to Bosnia, a country of 1.8 million.

“They just aren't taking it seriously enough, in my view, and I think the risk of coming out without a very satisfactory outcome is a real one.” The current mission is the first NATO effort outside the European zone.

Mr. Manley added that he believes Mr. Emerson should be maintained in his current role when Mr. Harper shuffles his cabinet.

“Well, I think if the Prime Minister called me about it, which he hasn't done, and I don't expect him to, I would say that David Emerson is exactly the person he should put in that job.”

Mr. Harper is expected imminently to make minor changes to the cabinet to replace Maxime Bernier, who had to resign after leaving secret documents at the home of his former girlfriend, Julie Couillard.

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