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NEWS STORY

Search is on for New Civilian Envoy to Kandahar

Experts and MPs praise Michel de Salaberry's work in Afghanistan, though their words for the mission overall aren't so nice.

By Lee Berthiaume

The government is searching for someone to take over as the top civilian co-ordinator in southern Afghanistan after Michel de Salaberry ended his six-month term in November.

Critics, however, said the Canadian mission in Afghanistan remains military heavy, despite Mr. de Salaberry's presence, and reiterated the need for more diplomats in the country.

When the respected former Canadian ambassador, who served as head of mission in Iran, Jordan and Egypt, was brought out of retirement last June, the government heralded his arrival as a major effort to bolster diplomatic aspects of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

It was felt having a senior Foreign Affairs official on the ground would help with decision-making and foster better interaction between Canadian and Afghan authorities, as well as the military and non-military elements of Canada's mission in the south.

It didn't hurt that Mr. de Salaberry was from Quebec and being deployed when Quebec's Royal 22nd Regiment was being rotated into Afghanistan that summer. Opposition to the mission has been strongest in that province.

During his term, Mr. de Salaberry's title was changed from "senior civilian co-ordinator" to "representative of Canada in Kandahar," Department of Foreign Affairs Afghan Task Force spokeswoman Lisa Monette said in an email.

"As the ambassador's [Arif Lalani] personal representative in Kandahar, Mr. de Salaberry co-ordinated all our civilian activities in the south, both at the Provincial Reconstruction Team and at Kandahar Airfield."

Ms. Monette said the envoy's term was always slated to expire after six months, and that the government is "currently reviewing applications from candidates for the position of representative of Canada in Kandahar."

"This position would be for one year, beginning as soon as the successor has been confirmed and can deploy."

Better co-ordination between Canadian departments and efforts in Afghanistan has been noted as key to the mission's success.

Envoy 'Constrained' by Military

Mr. de Salaberry met civil society officials in Ottawa on Dec. 17 where he presented a mixed

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Still, the creation of Mr. de Salaberry's position was a smart move, and Mr. Pellerin felt it

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would be imperative the next envoy in Kandahar be of equal stature. He wasn't confident such a successor could be easily found.

"The department is not used to going to these difficult positions, and not too many volunteers show up for these positions," he said. "What they need to do is get the department of Foreign Affairs more operational in the future, and the same with CIDA."

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