

'Jealousies' blamed for Afghan team's dissolution

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GLORIA GALLOWAY
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OTTAWA — A respected team of Canadian military officers that advises the Afghan government will be disbanded at the end of this month – a decision that military experts blame on the resentment of other Canadian government departments.

The Strategic Advisory Team will be replaced by a new organization led by the Canadian International Development Agency, which will focus on security, enhancement of institutions, border enhancement, and humanitarian aid.

The SAT is a group of 19 military officers and a handful of civilians who provide expertise directly to inexperienced Afghan public servants tasked with rebuilding the institutions of their failed state.

Its demise, which was announced formally in a press release on Friday, had been predicted for months.

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“Interdepartmental jealousies in Canada appear to have led to the cancellation of this program,” retired brigadier-general Don Macnamera wrote in a paper published this summer by the Conference of Defence Associations Institute.

“There is a very strong anti-military bias that says ‘Let's get rid of these guys because they are a bunch of military people doing things that the military shouldn't do,’” Mr. Macnamera said in a telephone interview Friday.

That assessment echoed the statements made in January by retired army colonel Mike Capstick, the first head of the SAT, who said: “At the bottom, at the crassest level, this is about bureaucratic jealousy between departments.”

The SAT was formally established in August, 2005, by then chief of defence staff Rick Hillier.

Yves Brodeur, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Afghanistan task force within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, said Friday he is saddened by the allegations of jealousies.

For his part, Mr. Macnamera said he casts no aspersions on other government departments, but the nature of the military dictates that its officers are uniquely skilled for the type of jobs performed by the SAT.

Because there are thousands of people employed by the Canadian Forces, it is possible to find experts skilled in any discipline, he said, and other government departments “recognize they don't have this capability,” Mr. Macnamera said.

In addition, he said, military officers can be deployed on short notice and they can look after themselves in an insecure environment.

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