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Embassy, August 20th, 2008  
**NEWS STORY**

## Afghan SAT Successor to Have Fewer Staff

**The Strategic Advisory Team employed more people with less money, yet critics say the government is doing development on the cheap.**

By Jeff Davis

With a budget of \$12.2 million to spend over the next five years, the newly established Canadian Governance Support Office in Kabul will provide fewer advisors to the Afghan government than its predecessor, the controversial Strategic Advisory Team.

According to Paul LaRose-Edwards, executive director of CANADEM, the Canadian NGO selected by the Canadian International Development Agency to administer the office,

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current funding levels are only enough to maintain a constant staff of seven or eight civilian advisors.

The Governance Support Office, which was established in July, aims to build the capacity of Afghanistan's ministries and governmental agencies. To do this, it will embed civilians with expertise in fields such as education within the ministries themselves for extended periods.

The office will replace the Strategic Advisory Team, a team of Canadian military officers that has been attached to various Afghan ministries since 2005. The SAT, a creation of former chief of defence staff Rick Hillier, will be formally disbanded at the end of August.

According to a DND spokesman, the SAT had a total of 14 Canadian soldiers on its staff when it closed. Of these, three were at the SAT's head office in Kabul while 11 were posted within Afghan ministries. The SAT's budget was \$1.33 million in fiscal year 2006-07, and \$1.5 in 2007-08.

Last week, government officials told *Embassy* the changeover "reflects that we are balancing away from a largely military to more of a civilian mission."

Mr. LaRose-Edwards said the Governance Support Office idea got off the ground when he submitted an unsolicited proposal to CIDA in April 2007. His initial request for \$98 million over five years, he said, would have allowed CANADEM to staff the office with about 20 to 25 civilian experts for a period of five years.

This initial proposal was rejected.

Mr. LaRose-Edwards then submitted another proposal for \$20 million over five years. When the final agreement was signed in July 2008, the program was given a budget of \$12.2 million for five years.

However, Mr. LaRose-Edwards said, additional funding

Days after the Governance Support Office was established in July, CANADEM dispatched to Afghanistan the man who will quarterback Canada's new capacity building program: Grant Brown.

Mr. Brown has behind him an impressive career with more than 30 years management experience in developed, developing and post-conflict countries. He has worked for CIDA, has served as an officer in the Canadian Navy, and has worked on projects in a wide variety of fields, including telecommunications, construction, mining, agriculture, education and banking

A native of Kitchener, Ont., Mr. Grant has served in a number of foreign destinations, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Colombia, India, Nepal and Thailand.

Until mid-2007, Mr. Grant was working for the American embassy in Baghdad and oversaw all American reconstruction and capacity building programs in Iraq.

### CANADEM at a Glance

CANADEM, a brainchild of Paul LaRose-Edwards, was founded as a way to connect Canadian workers with

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could eventually come down the pipe.

He said the Governance Support Office has a contribution agreement which allows for other parts of the government to contribute to the project.

"I suspect, and we're already getting an indication, that Foreign Affairs has money and other parts of CIDA have money, and they're going to use the CGSO platform," to dispatch additional experts to key ministries, he said.

"There's an expectation by a lot of people if it turns out well, and every indication is that it's going to turn out well, there will be more resources," he said.

While Mr. LaRose-Edwards said he does not know how much additional funding the office could receive, he remains confident it can handle a wider scope of operations than is currently planned.

"Can we handle \$100 million? Yeah, we can handle a lot more than that," he said.

Afghan agencies that will likely receive civilian advisors from the Governance Support Office include the Ministry of Education, the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Independent Electoral Commission. In addition, two Governance Support Office consultants will be assigned to work on Canada's signature project: the refurbishment of the Dahla irrigation dam on Kandahar Province's Arghandab river.

The office's staff will be drawn from CANADEM's roster of more than 10,000 civilian experts willing to work in challenging international posts.

Mr. LaRose-Edwards said annual salaries upwards of \$150,000 are often necessary to convince civilian development specialists to accept the risks of working in a warzone.

international skillsets to employers that need them.

Founded in 1996, CANADEM's centerpiece is a roster of more than 10,000 Canadians with international experience who are willing to be deployed on short notice to various world hotspots. CANADEM registrants boast specialized skillsets in such fields as human rights, counter-trafficking, security and policing, child protection, water and sanitation, humanitarian aid and governance.

Some 65 different languages are spoken by the workers listed on CANADEM's roster.

A not-for-profit NGO funded by the Canadian government, CANADEM has placed more than 2,500 experts in UN agencies, multilateral organizations, national governments, NGOs and private businesses in more than 70 countries.

CANADEM, whose offices are located at offices on Nicolas Street in Ottawa, has also dispatched over 1,200 election observers to Ukraine, Serbia, across South America and elsewhere.

More than 450 CANADEM registrants have worked in Afghanistan since 2002 under various organizations. Prior to the foundation of the

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While welcoming the transfer of capacity building responsibilities from the military to civilians, opposition critics doubted whether a budget of \$12 million will be enough to make a difference.

"We've always said the mission is really unbalanced," said Bloc Québécois Defence critic Claude Bachand. "More civilians, more diplomacy, more development, more counseling...I favour that rather than investing millions and millions in more soldiers and military equipment."

However, he said, "A \$12-million bill is not very much."

NDP Foreign Affairs critic Paul Dewar accused the government of "trying to redefine the mission on the cheap."

While the government has stated its intention to rebalance the mission towards more development and reconstruction, he said, more will be needed to make a real impact.

"I don't see how they can rebalance the mission, if that's their intention, with seven or eight people embedded within the Afghan bureaucracy," Mr. Dewar said. "I think what it requires is a very significant human resources influx, not just seven or eight people.

"If we believe the solution cannot be a military solution, if it has to be development and diplomacy, then they have to be putting money where their mouth is," he added.

Liberal International Development critic Keith Martin said the government has not clearly articulated why the Governance Support Office was established, nor what it hopes to achieve.

### 'A Lot of Brave Souls'

The Governance Support Office is being established amidst a worsening security situation in Afghanistan.

Just last week, two Canadian aid workers working for an NGO called the International Rescue Committee, Jackie Kirk and Shirley Case, were gunned down in a Taliban ambush in the Eastern province of Logar.

Governance Support Office, CANADEM received \$2.5 million in grants to send Canadians to Afghanistan to work in fields including police reform, justice reform, election observation, and civil-military relations.

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This attack, perhaps unsurprisingly, comes just two weeks after a report by the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) spoke to the sharp increase of attacks on international aid workers this year

"Aid organizations and their staff have been subject to increasing attacks, threats and intimidation, by both insurgent and criminal groups," the report said. "So far this year, 19 NGO staff have been killed, which already exceeds the total number of NGO workers killed last year."

Mr. LaRose-Edwards has no delusions about the security risk of sending aid workers into unstable countries. In 2005, a CANADEM policing expert, retired RCMP officer Mark Bourque, was killed in Haiti in an unprovoked attack.

"There's always a chance someone will get killed," he said.

Mr. LaRose-Edwards said the Governance Support Office will take steps to protect its staff. The staff will live together in a compound guarded by private security contractors similar to those that protect the Canadian Embassy in Kabul.

In addition, he said, competent drivers and some armoured vehicles will be purchased to help protect civilian experts while on the move.

In the event a worker is killed, \$750,000 in insurance money will go to the family of the deceased, he said.

Mr. LaRose-Edwards said the biggest guarantor of security will be recruiting civilian experts who have plenty of experience working in hostile environments and an eye for personal safety.

For example, the office's chief, Grant Brown, has extensive experience in Iraq. Meanwhile, the two men who will work on the Dahla Dam are of Afghan heritage and have years of experience working in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

"One of biggest mitigating measures is to make sure we've got the right expert that understands what's going on around them," he said.

Plus, he said, the folks being hired to staff the Governance Support Office are more than willing to shoulder the risks inherent to life in Afghanistan.

"Yes it's dangerous, but at the same time we have a lot of individuals who want to take

these risks, that are bound and determined to assist Afghanistan to move things forward," he said. They're saying to us, 'We want you to let us take these risks.'...They are a lot of brave souls."

[jdavis@embassymag.ca](mailto:jdavis@embassymag.ca)

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