

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
Visit to Afghanistan by Committee Officers
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
Afghanistan
October 23-26, 2008**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report on the *Visit to Afghanistan by Committee Officers*, October 2008. The visit was led by Canadian Senator Pierre Claude Nolin who is the Treasurer of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Vice-President of the Science and Technology Committee and Special Rapporteur on climate change.

INTRODUCTION

A delegation of senior members of parliament from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly visited Afghanistan in October 2008 in order to assess the state of the international community's engagement in that country. Over the four-day visit to Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, the delegation met with President Hamid Karzai, senior government officials, and members of the Afghan Parliament as well as a provincial governor. The delegation, which included parliamentarians from Canada, Germany, and the UK, also met with the ISAF Commander General David McKiernan and his subordinates, as well as UN and EU officials.

The themes and opinions expressed by interlocutors were diverse and sometimes conflicting. While most suggested there was reason for cautious optimism, and that the sense of pessimism widely perceived in the western media was somewhat overblown, several underlined that the next several months will be crucial to determining the medium and long term future of Afghanistan. The coming period will feature the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections, as well as an ambitious program to promote governance at the sub-national level. With several key Ministers newly in place, the prospect for progress in several areas was real; however, insecurity and corruption continued to hamper efforts in all sectors.

Officials from NATO and the Coalition underlined that an effective strategy was in place going forward, but that the military effort, while absolutely necessary, could not by itself create security and stability. The delegation was universally told that sustainable solutions in Afghanistan will require long term and steadfast effort by the broad range of international actors, whose contributions, while sometimes flawed, were greatly appreciated by Afghans overall.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The visit coincided with a number of pessimistic assessments of the prospects for Afghanistan in western press, a perception not shared by the NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Fernando Gentilini. He listed a number of positive strategic achievements this year, including the strengthening of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the arrival in Kabul of UN Special Representative Kai Eide in March, as well as NATO's agreement on the ISAF Strategic Vision at the April Bucharest Summit in meetings including President Karzai and the UN Secretary General. He also praised the new funds generated at the June donor's conference, under the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which itself

provided an overall framework for the international community's coordinated efforts under the three pillars of security, development, and governance.

The recent cabinet re-shuffle by President Hamid Karzai was widely seen as an encouraging step. In particular, the new Ministers of the Interior and of Agriculture were seen as especially competent and wise choices given the challenges for the former (corruption throughout, especially in the Afghan National Police) and the latter (a threatening food crisis). The re-shuffle would likely encourage donor countries and organizations to redouble their efforts.

The Presidential elections scheduled for 2009 were said to have the potential to re-energize the political process both domestically and internationally and could be seen as a continuation of the Bonn process. Ensuring these elections were conducted in a legitimate manner should be a priority, the delegation was told. A four-phase voter registration process in advance of these elections had begun only weeks before the delegation's arrival and was making progress; there had been no concerted efforts made to disrupt it.

The timing of the election was under discussion, with practical considerations (such as the weather) dictating elections in the autumn. However, Mirwais Yasini, Deputy Speaker of the Lower House (Wolesi Jirga) told the delegation that, on the basis of provisions of the Constitution, elections should be held in March or April. The delegation suggested that this was a question for the Afghans to decide.

Finally, the possibility of 'reconciliation' of some elements of the insurgency to the mainstream political process, including a reported initiative involving Saudi Arabia, was discussed with many interlocutors. Any 'reconciling' insurgent would have to recognize the Afghan Constitution and the principles on which it is founded, as well as renouncing violence. Such efforts would have to be led by the Government of Afghanistan and would optimally be negotiated from a position of strength.

An element of consensus among interlocutors was the need to increase the involvement and empowerment of Afghans in the political process, especially at the local level. This was a central element both in the military strategy pursued by ISAF and the Afghan government's sub-national governance program.

MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KARZAI

The delegation was received by President Hamid Karzai for an extensive dialogue on a wide range of issues. President Karzai suggested that great progress had been made since the fall of the Taliban in areas such as schooling and health care. But he regretted mistakes that had been made, particularly in the war on terror, which recognized only belatedly the danger of Pakistani sanctuaries and involvement. He knew that Pakistan had also suffered; he was glad that relations with the new Pakistan government were improving and that there were private discussions at all levels.

Addressing reports of reconciliation efforts and the involvement of Saudi Arabia, the President affirmed that he agreed with assessments that a military solution alone was no solution at all. After all, after six years of military operations and civilian casualties, the situation was certainly no better. He pressed for appropriate support from the international community for reconciliation efforts and the involvement of the Saudis,

suggesting the Islamic world needed to be involved in order to defeat a problem perpetuated in the name of Islam.

Iran's role had been positive overall, Karzai told the delegation, although some problems were evident. He had no first-hand evidence to confirm rumours of Iranian support to the Taliban, he said, and was grateful for Iran's general support for international involvement in Afghanistan. The international community had to recognize that Iran was and would remain Afghanistan's neighbour.

President Karzai called efforts to promote sub-national governance an absolute priority, suggesting that it was essential to bring community-based security back to Afghanistan, a concept that had traditionally worked well. President Karzai also pleaded for greater involvement of Afghans in the planning and conduct of operations, which could otherwise be endangered by poor intelligence and cause critical damage to the reputation of international forces among the Afghan public. He also lamented the use of private security companies, which thrived on insecure environments.

Combating corruption was an exceptionally difficult challenge due to the poverty of most Afghans and the corrosive effect of the narcotics trade, coupled with weak governance structures and administrative capacity. This would be a years-long effort. President Karzai lamented the fact that the contracts structured by donors often resulted in funding channelling back to western contractors, rather than Afghans.

Given continued progress, the President believed that Afghanistan would soon be a peaceful small country that posed no threat to its neighbours or the international community. However, even in the best scenario, Afghanistan would continue to struggle with poverty, lack of education, and narcotics and governance problems, much like other poor countries throughout the world.

SECURITY

General David McKiernan, Commander of ISAF, did not believe the insurgency was stronger than the previous year; it did not have the same level of ambition of, for example, controlling Kandahar. Rather, its tactics and strategy had adjusted to wage a campaign of fear through asymmetrical terrorist activities. He described the insurgency as a 'syndicate' that brought together numerous groups including but not limited to the Taliban, with diverse and overlapping interests.

The ISAF Commander informed the delegation that he had recently been "dual-hated" as Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, which put him in command of an additional 10,900 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. This allowed for the application of U.S. military assets across the entire territory of Afghanistan and improved unity of effort. The General also praised the recent transfer of lead security to Afghans for the city of Kabul, suggesting this success could be repeated elsewhere in Afghanistan.

ISAF was employing a "Shape, Clear, Hold, Build" strategy: *shaping* the environment before an operation through meetings with local shuras and other leadership; *clearing* an area of insurgents; *holding* it in order to prevent re-infiltration and retribution by the Taliban; and *building* through development and reconstruction projects in order to provide a tangible benefit to the local population.

Local officials should be more involved in NATO operations, the General stated, given their extensive knowledge of the terrain and local conditions. ISAF was undertaking a new approach to community outreach, involving local shuras (councils) and promoting a 'bargain' between local authorities, who would take responsibility for their communities, and the central government, which would pledge the necessary resources to support them.

The approach was both comprehensive (taking into account governance and development as well as security) and integrated (in cooperation with the government and other international actors). Using a Comprehensive Approach and focusing on governance and development as well as security was necessary, the General told the delegation, as was the need for sustained international will and improved continuity of effort.

General McKiernan suggested that all NATO nations should be pursuing a *counter-insurgency* approach, even if this term was not included in NATO doctrines or documents. The fact that many nations didn't want their military forces working with Afghan National Police was "fundamentally wrong for the 21st century," he suggested. In the next several years, protecting the Afghan people would require the development of a paramilitary capacity within the ANP. The General believed the training of the Afghan National Security Forces would eventually get to a tipping point at which ISAF could hand over security responsibilities and be withdrawn from Afghanistan, a prospect that remained some years off, according to the General.

Discussing ISAF's role in counter-narcotics, General McKiernan told the group that existing authorities allowed NATO to support the government of Afghanistan's efforts through, for example, providing logistics, *in extremis* support, and medical evacuation. NATO was in discussions on broadening these authorities to include direct action against insurgent-linked narcotics targets. The General supported greater interdiction efforts, arguing that the estimated \$100 million annual drug revenue accruing to the Taliban paid for weapons that were killing NATO soldiers. He did not advocate NATO's involvement in eradication, noting that this could negatively affect public opinion of ISAF.

Lamenting the continued presence of operational caveats, General McKiernan stated his view that NATO had an inherent advantage over any adversary in Afghanistan through intelligence, speed, firepower, logistics and other attributes; national caveats reduced those advantages and put NATO soldiers at higher risk. In addition, insurgents are fully aware of national caveats and plan their own activities accordingly.

The General called for fully resourcing validated military requirements; finding a better approach to developing the human capital of Afghanistan in order to ensure it is not completely dependent on the international community indefinitely; and working to deny safe havens to the insurgency.

The Minister of Defence, Abdul Rahim Wardak, expressed confidence that with continued help from the international community, Afghanistan could contain the threat, control the security situation, and eventually reverse negative trends. While the Afghan National Army (ANA) should be considered a success story, it still lacked enabling capabilities to allow it full independence, including air assets and reconnaissance.

Eventually, the Minister believed the ANA would participate in peacekeeping missions abroad to repay the Afghan debt to the international community.

Minister Wardak called for greater sharing of intelligence and joint planning with Afghan officials, and suggested increased Afghanization of operations, such as sending Afghan forces to make arrests. He also underlined his concern regarding friendly-fire incidents and civilian casualties.

The delegation learned that the challenges facing the Afghan National Police (ANP) continue to pose a major obstacle to ensuring security at the local level. With a 70% illiteracy rate among recruits, and a high level of drug dependency, ANP personnel was often seen as 'soft targets' by the insurgency and targeted disproportionately; as a result, the ANP has suffered a high level of casualties (over 1,000 to date). Most interlocutors called for maximum support to the substantial anti-corruption efforts and police reforms undertaken by the new Minister of the Interior, Mohammad Hanif Atmar.

The Delegation was briefed on the EU Police Training Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL), by the Deputy Head of Mission Colonel Umberto Rocca and his staff. The mission, whose mission was to monitor, advise, and mentor police officials, stood at 174 personnel and a decision had been reached in May to double its size. All personnel were senior police officers with professional backgrounds, under a low-quantity but high-quality approach. EUPOL continued to seek support from some member states' Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in theatre, Colonel Rocca stated.

The United States had taken a different approach in police training, according to Major General Robert Cone, Commander of Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, who stated that the U.S. was committing 95% of the overall resources spent on police training and had deployed 2,700 trainers. General Cone, whose organization is the U.S. element responsible for standing up Afghan National Security Forces, suggested that tours of duty in Afghanistan should be no less than 12-16 months. He asserted that this was the minimum time necessary to develop the necessary trust with Afghan personnel. Accordingly, Operational Liaison and Mentoring Teams (OMLTs) provided by NATO nations should be in theatre for one year, he suggested.

The Afghan National Army (ANA) was a success story, according to interlocutors including General Cone. While it still faced some weaknesses such as logistics and command and control, the ANA was fully engaged against the insurgency and achieving significant victories while increasingly leading operations. There were no recruitment problems, and conscription was not on the table. General Cone suggested that investing in the security forces' salaries was an important investment in development and governance as well, given that the soldiers were sending their wages home to tribe and family, thus tying the local structure to the central government.

The ANA's operating strength was rising quickly and approval had been given for its eventual doubling in size to a future strength of 134,000 personnel. Over the long term, the ANA would cost over \$3 billion to sustain annually. This would not be sustainable in the long term by the Afghan government alone; General Cone, however, regarded this a reasonable investment given the \$50 billion annual cost of maintaining international forces in Afghanistan today. Defence Minister Wardak was optimistic that long-term

economic growth in Afghanistan would in the long run allow Afghanistan to sustain its armed forces independently.

General Cone suggested that ISAF's mandate should include police training, and that the U.S. could provide funding to build facilities and provide equipment to accelerate the growth of the ANP, but that he would not authorize its release if the requisite number of trainers were not available.

The Delegation also visited ISAF's Regional Commands Capital and North. At Regional Command-Capital (RC-C), the Delegation learned that lead security responsibility for Kabul had been assumed by Afghan security forces in August, a move that was widely viewed as a success, as evidenced by the 50% decrease in security incidents in the capital. RC-C Commander Brigadier General Michel Stollsteiner, disputed reports that Kabul was 'encircled,' suggesting that the presence of insurgents and their freedom of action in the area was limited. The delegation also learned about the Command's extensive civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) activities, which were often coordinated with operations such as security sweeps.

The Commander of Regional Command North (RC-N) argued that while the north of Afghanistan was comparatively stable, it could not be taken for granted that the area was the completely safe place that reporting suggested. Commander Weigt saw a mix of threats to his area of operations, but suggested he had the forces required to confront any eventuality. He emphasized consolidating gains made in the region by increasing development efforts there. Commander Weigt suggested that reform of the Afghan police was a key concern in his region, and that the quality and quantity of trained police were both important.

GOVERNANCE

Many interlocutors pointed to the need to strengthen local governance as central to state-building in Afghanistan. In August 2007, the Afghan government had created the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to establish an institutional, legal and financial framework to improve the operating capacity of the government at a local level.

Jelani Popal, the Director of IDLG, told the delegation that the international community's initial exclusive focus on supporting the central government allowed a void to emerge at the local level, which had been filled in some areas by the Taliban. For example, EU Special Representative Ambassador Ettore Segui warned of the creation of parallel structures by the Taliban. He explained that in the absence of a reliable justice system, Taliban courts had emerged in Helmand province and were actively resolving property disputes. Contrary to official institutions, these courts made decisions quickly and were in a position to enforce them.

The IDLG was therefore created to supervise provincial and district governors, provincial councils and municipalities outside of Kabul. Among its most visible achievements thus far was the replacement of 13 provincial governors; it has also prompted progress of legislation that will mandate delegation of authority and funding to provinces.

DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Regarding NATO's system of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), Jelani Popal, the Director of IDLG, sought to cooperate with PRTs to implement government priorities through Provincial Development Plans, which were based on projects suggested by locals. Popal sought the PRTs' assistance in developing Afghan capacity at the provincial level for planning and budgeting, rather than substituting themselves for local governance and thus undermining local officials. He also called for the civilian elements of PRTs to be strengthened and to remain in country for longer than 6 month tours in order to ensure continuity. Finally, he suggested PRTs focus more on long-term projects rather than exclusively on quick-impact ones. Popal affirmed that one kilometre of road financed through Afghan channels would cost \$500,000, while the same kilometre, built through direct bilateral assistance, would cost no less than \$1,000,000.

No actor in Afghanistan had an accurate assessment of how much aid was coming into Afghanistan, according to Tom Gregg, Special Assistant to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Kai Eide. UNAMA was bringing in a new official on 'aid effectiveness' to make an accurate assessment.

EU Special Representative Segui briefed the delegation on the extensive humanitarian challenges caused by the recent severe winter followed by a severe drought, causing the price of wheat, for example, to increase by 300%. Four to six million Afghans could be affected over the coming wintertime, according to Segui.

The delegation was hosted by UNAMA's northern regional office in Mazar-E-Sharif for a series of briefings on subjects including refugee repatriation; economic challenges posed by a harsh winter followed by severe drought; the precarious state of children in the region; the endemic challenges of corruption compounded by weak rule of law; challenges to freedom of expression; and capacity building at the local level.

UNAMA regional officials called for donor funds to be channelled through Afghan authorities rather than bilaterally, and in particular for greater use of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund by donors in order to increase Afghan ownership of development projects.

Pointing out a \$21.9 billion shortfall in aid expected over the next five years, UNAMA regional officials called for increased funding of long-term projects over quick-impact proposals, and increased investment in the extraction of the region's mineral resources, which could be exploited for Afghanistan's long-term gain. While a construction boom and other increased economic activities were evident in the provincial capital, they noted, very little aid was reaching Afghans at the district level, and their lives had not improved appreciably since the fall of the Taliban.

The delegation also met with the Governor of the Balkh province, Ustad Atta Mohammed Noor. Governor Atta suggested greater efficiency could result from increased use of local governance structures and labor rather than western contractors. He confirmed his region's potential and unexplored mineral wealth, as well as other types of economic activity with untapped potential, such as carpet making and the export of dried fruit. He called for greater overall coordination among international forces and donors, as well as increased involvement of Afghans in planning processes.

PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

The delegation met with a group of eight female members of the Afghan Parliament, whose concerns centred on deteriorating security conditions (both nationally and individually) and economic difficulties. One parliamentarian from Helmand province explained that for security reasons, she had not been able to travel to her district for three years; another stated that her brother had been killed by insurgents in retaliation for her political activities. Kidnappings of civilians were on the rise, and incidents of civilian casualties caused by international forces continued, the parliamentarians stated. The absence of rule of law crippled society, they argued, and the police forces were nearly powerless. Suggestions from the MPs included employing more local youths to provide security for highways; a more active NATO involvement in counter-narcotics; and increased vocational education and training for women by the international community. One parliamentarian recommended a re-structuring of the international forces in Afghanistan to focus exclusively on border security.

The Deputy President of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) of Parliament, Mirwais Yasini, expressed gratitude for the continued access of Afghan parliamentarians to NATO Parliamentary Assembly activities, suggesting that any opportunity for Afghans to learn from the experience of their colleagues abroad was helpful. The Speaker of the Upper House (Meshrano Jirga), Hazrat Sibghatulla al-Mojaddedi, confirmed to the delegation that discussions were ongoing between the Afghan and Pakistani parliaments. The delegation underlined the importance of such dialogue and suggested the Assembly could play a useful role in promoting it.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P.
Chair
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)	
ACTIVITY	Visit to Afghanistan by Committee Officers	
DESTINATION	Afghanistan	
DATES	October 23-26, 2008	
DELEGATION		
SENATE	Senator Pierre Claude Nolin	
HOUSE OF COMMONS		
STAFF		
TRANSPORTATION		\$16,836.16
ACCOMMODATION		\$141.62
HOSPITALITY		\$0.00
PER DIEMS		\$217.33
OFFICIAL GIFTS		\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES		\$84.85
TOTAL		\$17,279.96