

FIRST REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

REPORT ON A TRIP TO AFGHANISTAN

28 MAY – 3 JUNE 2010

INTRODUCTION

From 28 May until 3 June 2010, the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan visited Afghanistan to consult with Afghans, as well as senior Canadian, United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and allied officials and diplomats on the status of the Canadian mission and to examine ideas regarding its future. First and foremost, the Committee was greatly impressed by the sheer courage, dedication and commitment of Canadian soldiers, police and civilians, living and working in the toughest of conditions. Equally important, the Committee was struck by the effective work being done by our diplomats and development workers. In visiting both the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) and a forward position in Panjwayi District, we learned about the degree of co-operation between civilian and military, between Canadians and Americans, between the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, and between Canadian and Afghan military forces at the platoon level. We were thoroughly impressed by the determination and value of these efforts.

Committee members unanimously agree that, in their collective experience, this was the best, most successful trip to Afghanistan they have had. We wish to make special mention of the extraordinary assistance provided by a number of people and offer them our heartfelt thanks. Canadian Ambassador William Crosbie met us in Kandahar and accompanied the Committee throughout its stay in Afghanistan, sharing informed commentary throughout. In Kabul, Ambassador Crosbie and his staff orchestrated an impressive range of discussions with prominent Afghans and Afghan parliamentarians, allied diplomats, senior NATO officials and important development partners. In Kandahar, the Acting Commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan, Colonel Simon Hetherington, and the Canadian Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK), Mr. Ben Rowswell and their staffs provided the Committee with extraordinary access to field personnel and information, all of which was directly relevant to our role and interests. The Committee was particularly grateful for the guidance and support provided by Major General Peter Devlin, Deputy Commander, Canadian Expeditionary Force Command and Ms. Sara Hradecky, a former Canadian Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and currently the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Afghanistan Task Force in the Privy Council Office, who accompanied us from beginning to end and made sure we got to see and hear all that we should. Finally, but certainly not least, we offer our thanks to Ms. Greta Bossenmaier, the Deputy Minister of the Afghanistan Task Force in the Privy Council Office for her diligent work in directing the planning and organization of our visit. Her professional approach and eagerness to help us set the tone for all

that followed. To all those who got us there and back, and to all those who briefed us during our stay, we offer our deepest gratitude and thanks.

At the time of the visit, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) was holding a National Consultative Peace Jirga to discuss, inter alia, reconciliation and reintegration of disaffected Afghan insurgents and planning for the upcoming Kabul conference in July, which is expected to see a revitalized Afghan approach to long-term development.¹ Through meetings and hands-on activities in both Kandahar and Kabul, the Committee studied the range of Canada's whole-of-government activities in Afghanistan. We were briefed on the status of the NATO counterinsurgency campaign and examined associated challenges facing the government of Afghanistan in the areas of governance and development, as well as the recently revitalized efforts of the international community to address them.

BACKGROUND

On 13 March 2008, Parliament passed a motion extending the Canadian military presence in Kandahar, as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), beyond February 2009, to July 2011, to train Afghan National Security Forces, provide security for reconstruction and development efforts in Kandahar province and continue to exercise responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team.² It called for the augmentation of the Canadian diplomatic and development effort, which was done. A number of conditions were also attached to the extension of the military mission, all of which were met. First, this Committee was established in 2008. Then, as requested, another NATO battle group was deployed into Kandahar province. The Canadian government provided medium-to-heavy lift and utility helicopters along with additional high-performance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. A new NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan has been established and is working to firm targets for the training and equipping of Afghan National Security Forces. Finally, NATO has been notified that our military commitment in Kandahar will end as of July 2011 and Canadian troops are scheduled to be completely withdrawn by December 2011.

It is important to note that the overall NATO mission in Afghanistan has evolved since the passage of the Parliamentary motion in 2008. The Taliban insurgency gained strength and influence throughout 2008 and most of 2009. Concurrently, in 2009, the United States (US) government decided to significantly augment its overall effort in Afghanistan. In 2009, tens of thousands of additional US military forces began to arrive in the southern provinces of Afghanistan. Thousands of additional US civilian diplomats and development officers were also deployed, accompanied by millions of dollars in additional development funding. Other allies

¹ See the Peace Jirga Resolution at http://president.gov.af/Contents/88/Documents/1834/resolution_English.htm.

² The Government motion was presented to the House of Commons on 25 February 2008. See Government Orders, 1200, "Hansard", at <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2&DocId=3296893#OOB-2328858>.

agreed to contribute additional forces and resources. In June 2009, General (US) Stanley McChrystal was appointed to command ISAF in Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan government and ISAF are currently engaged in a comprehensive, population-centered and governance-led counterinsurgency campaign, which involves concurrent governance, development and military efforts across southern Afghanistan. It began in Helmand Province last February and is now being prosecuted in Kandahar City and its environs. This campaign recognizes the need to succeed in three areas – security, governance and development. While success in any one area is necessary, it is insufficient on its own. It must be won in all three. Security enables governance and development. Good governance reinforces security and delivers development. Development encourages security and good governance. Consequently, with a revised and broadly-accepted strategy, and significantly increased resources, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and ISAF intend 2010 to be a year of decision, in which initiative is wrested from Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan, enhanced governance is developed at all levels and an effective development program established.

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS CONSULTED

The Committee met with a number of senior NATO military commanders, including: General (US) Stanley McChrystal, Commander of ISAF; Major-General (UK) Nick Carter, Commander ISAF Regional Command South; Brigadier-General (Canada) Craig King, Director Future Plans, Regional Command South; and Colonel Simon Hetherington, Acting Commander, Joint Task Force Afghanistan. Their briefings gave us a comprehensive familiarity with the NATO counterinsurgency campaign being prosecuted across southern Afghanistan.

We also met with Lieutenant General (US) William Caldwell, Commander of the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) and Canadian Major-General Mike Ward, the NTM-A Deputy Commander for Afghan National Police training. Other senior NTM-A appointments also attended the meeting. They engaged in discussion with members about the state of Afghan National Security Force training and ideas for a possible future Canadian training role in NTM-A.

At the Kandahar Airfield, the Committee was given an extensive tour of the Canadian Detention Facility, including observation of detainees in holding cells, and briefed on the thoroughly professional procedures for the handling of Afghan detainees by Canadian Forces (CF). We also met the Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK), Mr. Ben Rowswell and received briefings from his senior staff. Later, during a visit to Kandahar City, the Committee met with Canadian officials in the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) to receive briefings on Canadian development efforts throughout Kandahar province. While in Kandahar City, the Committee met with the Governor of Kandahar province, along with the Mayor of Kandahar City and a number of Ministers and District Governors. We also visited Sarpoza prison to meet the Warden and see first-hand the positive improvements to the prison being made with the help of Canadian assistance.

The Committee travelled by Chinook helicopter to the District Operational Coordination Centre in Panjwayi District and met Lieutenant-Colonel Conrad Mialkowski, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group that operates in partnership with Kandak 2 of the 1st Brigade, 205 Corps of the Afghan National Army (ANA), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Sakhi Barriz, who briefed us on his view of the situation in his area of responsibility. We also received briefings from representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) and US diplomatic and development personnel from the US Department of State and Agency for International Development (USAID), all of whom lived with the soldiers, in austere conditions at the base.

The Committee was accompanied in Kandahar by Canadian Ambassador William Crosbie, who then hosted us in Kabul. Upon arrival in the capital, Committee members participated in a working-reception for the Committee with a number of Afghan parliamentarians.

The next morning, the Committee met with Embassy program managers in key areas, including development, political affairs, security, and security intelligence. Next, we participated in a roundtable discussion on local development and sub-national governance with invited representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the UN, NATO and independent development organizations.

Representatives from a number of implementing development partners joined the Committee for a working lunch, to review their role and accomplishments. Among those attending were Colonel (Retired) Mike Capstick, from the Peace Dividend Trust, and Cindy Fair, representing the Canadian Governance Support Office that works in support of Afghan government ministries.

In the evening, the Committee shared a working dinner with Ambassadors from France, Germany and the UK, and representatives from the US and the European Union. The Senior Civilian Representative of NATO also attended.

The next morning, Steffan de Mistura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN for Afghanistan, joined the Special Committee for an in-depth discussion of the overall situation in Afghanistan. This was followed by discussion with a panel of Afghan civil society representatives. Panel members included Dr. Massouda Jalal, a former Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs under President Karzai, twice a candidate for the Presidency of Afghanistan and activist for women's rights; a commissioner of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; a representative of the Asia Foundation; media representatives and the Executive Director of the Kabul Center for Strategic Studies.

We were particularly honoured with opportunities to meet with two important Ministers in the Afghan Government. Mohammed Asif Rahimi, the Minister of Agriculture, joined us at the Canadian Embassy. The Special Committee then travelled to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet with Dr. Zalmi Rassoul, who spent seven years as National Security Advisor to President Karzai before becoming Foreign Minister in January 2010.

FINDINGS

The objective of ensuring an Afghan state capable of ending internal conflict and providing basic services to its people will clearly not be met before the end of 2011.

There exist important regional considerations in the search for peace and security in Afghanistan, including the role of the Central Asian states, Iran and Pakistan. In the latter case, we heard concerns that the Taliban still seems to benefit both from a geographic base in Pakistan that allows cross-border movement, as well as some degree of institutional support. While relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have improved significantly following the democratic election of a civilian government in Pakistan, important challenges remain, and Pakistan must be a part of the long-term solution in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, profoundly serious issues remain. The death and destruction of the last 30 years has deeply traumatised all parts of Afghan society. Afghan institutions at every level lack capacity, transparency, and accountability. There is a desperate shortage of teachers, doctors, nurses, and professionals of every kind. Violence and insecurity, among other factors, make it hard to recruit such people in the geographical areas that need them most. The necessary work of reconciliation has proven slow and politically contentious. Corruption is widespread and corrosive. These circumstances exist in the context of a continuing and pervasive insurgency.

The single biggest challenge, beyond the establishment of a secure environment, is the requirement to connect government to ordinary Afghans and connect them to their government. As the counterinsurgency campaign aims to clear Taliban insurgents from southern Afghanistan, the difficult objective of enhanced governance is being pursued at the local, district and provincial levels. The Committee was impressed by the focus of this strategy, but heard concerns about the ability to follow through on the ground.

As additional US forces flow into Kandahar province, the Canadian battle group area of responsibility has been reduced in size, allowing for a more effective concentration of force. The Canadian-led Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, in partnership with the US, has taken on a more substantial role as essentially a secretariat to the provincial governor. Outside Kandahar City, in keeping with the counterinsurgency strategy, smaller groups of Canadian military forces and civilian police are permanently deployed in villages throughout Panjwayi and Dand districts, where they work in partnership with Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police elements to protect local populations. Canadian diplomats and development officers are also deployed to live with Canadian military and civilian police forces in forward locations and extend their support to district governors.

The Afghan National Army has taken on more of its expected share of security duties, but it will continue to need mentoring and training assistance for many years. The Afghan National Police are not as advanced as the army and are in greater need of mentoring and training assistance. Plans for the growth of the army and police are on track, but beyond quantity, the quality of leaders, soldiers and police requires further work. By July 2011, the requirement for military support may

have shifted from one of combat partnership to one of training partnership, as the Afghan National Army moves beyond simple combat capability, to establish the professional development programs expected of an institutional army in a democratic society.

As the military requirement shifts from combat to professional development support, there will be a parallel, increasing need for capacity building in the field of governance. The greatest obstacle to the quick establishment of effective governance is the lack of human capacity. Training for on-budget program planning and delivery will be required of an expanded government bureaucracy at all levels. To effectively establish the rule of law judges must be trained and court officers, prosecutors and defence attorneys will be required. As governance improves, governments at all levels will require assistance to plan and deliver development programs to Afghans, in a manner that holds them accountable for results. Tapping the Afghan diaspora in Canada might be one source of talent and experience in this difficult endeavour.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to evolve and it is for this reason that we suggest the time has come for Parliament to begin serious discussion on the future of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan after 2011. The 2008 parliamentary motion will form the background of such discussion. It is also clear that we need a fresh framework for the period beyond 2011.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The Committee urges Parliament to consider carefully the progress made recently in the Canadian approach to our mission in Afghanistan. We therefore recommend that the Parliament and government of Canada enter into an intensive and constructive discussion as soon as possible about Canada's work in Afghanistan and the region for the post July 2011 period. In particular, the Committee recommends that the focus of this discussion should continue to be on how to strengthen the ability of the Afghan government to provide basic services to its people: security, rule of law, health, social services and education. The end of the combat mission in Canada in 2011 should by no means be seen as the end of the engagement by Canada and Canadians. We have come too far, and sacrificed too much to abandon the people of Afghanistan. A final decision on this question should be reached before the end of 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

KEVIN SORENSON
Chair