



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA**

VISIT TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Report of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

**Rick Casson, M.P.
Chair**

JUNE 2009

40th PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION



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**Report of the Special Committee on
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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

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THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

has the honour to present its

FIRST REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under the motion adopted by the House of Commons on February 10, 2009, the Committee travelled to Washington, D.C. and has agreed to report the following:

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Visit of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan to Washington

Introduction

On April 23, 2009, the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan travelled to Washington for meetings on the Obama administration's new US Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. This policy represents a significant change in the American approach to the region, and will have a significant impact on international efforts in Afghanistan. On April 12, Dr. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote of the new policy that the President "has developed at least the broad outline of a new strategy for Afghanistan, and made it clear that the US is now prepared to treat the conflict as the Afghan-Pakistan conflict it has always been. He has shown that the US now will work with the UN, and pay far more attention to its partners in NATO – both in developing a new strategic concept and setting goals for their participation in NATO/ISAF."¹ Cordesman added in testimony before the US Congress that:

The administration's shift in strategy, if properly resourced and implemented, can win the war. Our enemies are still relatively weak and heavily dependent on paid part-time fighters and exploiting the power vacuum left by too few NATO/ISAF troops and half-willing, half-able Afghan and Pakistan governments... The odds are better than even, but they are not good... Moreover, this is our war. Our allies and host country partners are critical, but it is our actions and resources that will determine whether we win or lose.²

US Strategic Review

The Bush administration had initiated a number of reviews of US strategy in Afghanistan in its later days, and upon his inauguration President Barack Obama ordered a further 60-day interagency review. While the review was still underway, the president announced the appointment of veteran diplomat Richard Holbrooke as his special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and also ordered an additional 17,000 US military forces to Afghanistan.

¹ Anthony Cordesman, *The Obama Administration and US Strategy: The First Hundred Days*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 12, 2009.

² Dr. Anthony Cordesman, "U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan: Achieving Peace and Stability in the Graveyard of Empires," Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, April 2, 2009.

The report of the Strategic Review of American policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan was released on March 27, just days before an international conference on Afghanistan held at The Hague. Key elements of the new strategy included: a restatement of the overall American goal of protecting its homeland by disrupting, dismantling and defeating al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and preventing the return of it or its allies to Afghanistan; treating Afghanistan and Pakistan as “two countries but one challenge;”³ increasing resources, including a significant increase in the civilian effort; and an increased focus on training Afghan National Security Forces. (President Obama also responded to an outstanding request by sending another 4,000 Americans trainers to Afghanistan). The concise White Paper report of the review noted that the tasks facing the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan “require a new way of thinking about the challenges, a wide ranging diplomatic strategy to build support for our efforts, enhanced engagement with the publics in the region and at home, and a realization that all elements of international power – diplomatic, informational, military and economic - must be brought to bear. They will also require a significant change in the management, resources, and focus of our foreign assistance.”⁴ Allies generally welcomed the results of the review, with Canadian foreign minister Lawrence Cannon stating that “There are many elements of the plan set out in the review that Canada and Canadians would recognize from our own transformation of the mission in the past year...”⁵

Meetings in Washington

While in Washington, members of the Special Committee met with: Canadian diplomats that follow US policies closely; senior American officials responsible for diplomacy, development and defence policy issues related to Afghanistan and Pakistan; and those directly involved with the strategic review. Committee members were also exposed to congressional opinions, as well as those of knowledgeable outside observers. In addition to allowing Members to pose questions on the arguments contained in the White Paper, these meetings provided more detail both on the review process itself, and on developments that followed its publication.

Interlocutors explained that the new administration had ordered the Strategic Review because they were convinced that American efforts in Afghanistan were not only under-resourced, but also not properly focused. The President’s decision to dispatch the 17,000 troops immediately was taken in an attempt to begin breaking the momentum of the Taliban, after which the other elements of the strategy could be more effective. Given a combination of the situation on the ground, the fact that key allies were scheduled to end their current missions in Afghanistan and the broader fact that US public opinion was “war-weary,”

³ “What’s New in the Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” White House Press Office, March 27, 2009.

⁴ See *White Paper of the of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on US Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 27, 2009.

⁵ “Statement by Minister Cannon on U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategic Review,” Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade News Release No. 81, March 27, 2009,

officials told the Committee that the United States have a window of perhaps two years to show that the new strategy was working and showing progress on the ground. The review process involved soliciting input from allies, notably the Afghans and Pakistanis, but input was also sought from Canada and others. Officials told the Committee, for example, that the National Security Council had asked for a briefing on Canada's Afghanistan benchmarks.

The Challenge of Pakistan

If one message stood out from the committee's meetings in Washington, it was that the United States has come to recognize the critical importance of Pakistan to any chance of lasting success in Afghanistan, but more fundamentally to stability and peace in the region as a whole. Given the deteriorating situation in Pakistan, in fact, one senior official said that while the focus in Washington had been on what Pakistan could do for Afghanistan when the review was released in late March, by the time of the committee visit in late April the focus had become what to do for Pakistan. While discussion about the vulnerability of Pakistan's nuclear weapons may simply be the result of increased media attention, as a key nuclear-armed Muslim nation Pakistan is "a critical, critical strategic country" in the words of one senior official. He continued that while the situation in Afghanistan remained a serious challenge, it was a more "intellectually manageable" problem than that of Pakistan, given that we know what needs to be done there and now have what he believes is a realistic strategy to achieve it -- provided it is adequately resourced. Another participant in the review told the committee that the challenge could be broadly seen as one of military and non-military capacity building on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border.

As a result of a combination of historical and other factors, Pakistan is not only the most important US partner in the fight against al-Qaeda, but also the most difficult one. Interlocutors argued that the basic problem is that Pakistan's military and political establishment still has not recognized that the Taliban and other extremists represent a greater existential threat to the country than does its traditional enemy, India. While many Muslim countries had reached a "tipping point" that convinced them of the real nature of the threat, this has not yet occurred in Pakistan despite developments including the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and the fall 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India. Unfortunately there is no "silver bullet" solution to these problems, and the US approach will be to significantly increase assistance to Pakistan, engage it continually, and attempt to create space to allow the Pakistani establishment to change its strategic approach. Countries such as Canada that do not have the same history in the region as the US can be helpful in a number of areas, but that the ultimate need is for all countries -- including India, which is and must be a partner in this -- to have one voice on these problems and demonstrate a long-term commitment.

Implementing the Strategy

A senior administration official told the committee that writing the new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan had been the easy part – the challenge would be implementing it. An important point is that the strategy is meant as a comprehensive “roadmap” rather than a “straightjacket,” and once appropriate benchmarks are developed and ongoing evaluations undertaken, resources and policies will be adapted -- “on-ramped” or “off-ramped” -- as necessary to support it.

A key element of the new strategy, and one that was emphasized in meetings with officials at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), will be a significant increase in civilian assistance in such areas as agriculture. At the same time, the US faces serious difficulties such as recruitment and mounting what some call a “civilian surge” of 400- 500 people. This was underlined by the fact that it is considering using military reserve lists to identify qualified civilians that may wish to enlist for civilian service in the region for at least a year.⁶

The majority of additional US civilian and military forces will be deployed in the south and east of Afghanistan, where officials told the committee it was expected they would cooperate very closely with Canada and other allies. The day before the US strategy was released David Mulrone, the Deputy Minister of the Afghanistan Task Force, told the Special Committee that:

...a great deal of our diplomatic strategy in Washington and in Brussels, London, and other places is ensuring that we have an effective partnership with the Americans. The Americans have accepted the six priorities. They've accepted our plans, they think they're sound, and they're willing to contribute.

There will be a geographic division of labour, and the Americans will soon make that clear to us. They will be present in some parts of Kandahar where we have not been able to be present, or where we've had to withdraw and the Taliban have come back. The key effect will be that Canada will be more focused on major population centres in and around Kandahar City, which is exactly where we want to have the impact with our priorities...

The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team will lead on governance efforts in Afghanistan. The Americans have told us that, and it will continue to be the case. That being said, we will partner with them in the security area, and we will have a very capable partner to assist us in dealing with the insurgency.⁷

⁶ A report appeared in the *Washington Post* on this issue the day of the Committee's meetings in Washington. See Karen DeYoung, “Reservists Might be Used in Afghanistan to Fill Civilian Jobs,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 2009.

⁷ House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, *Evidence*, 26 March 2009.

Allied Decisions

When Members noted in Washington that both the Netherlands and Canada were scheduled to end their current combat missions in Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011 respectively, they received different but not contradictory answers from US officials. One said that if nations did need to end their current missions, the United States would encourage them to think creatively about how they could continue to contribute to international efforts, perhaps through increased commitments in such areas as training. Another official took a broader perspective, telling Members that while consideration had been given to asking allies to reconsider such commitments, the decision had been taken to focus instead in the first instance on implementing the new strategy. If this succeeds in changing facts on the ground, countries will then be able to decide as they think best.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INDIVIDUALS WHO MET WITH THE COMMITTEE

(On April 23, 2009)

Organizations and Individuals

Canadian Embassy

Col. Craig Hilton, Canadian Forces Military Attaché and Assistant Defence Attaché

Bruce Levy, Minister-Counsellor (Political)

Rebecca Netley, First Secretary (Political)

Kevin Adams, First Secretary (Defence)

Pasquale Salvaggio, Second Secretary (Provincial, Territorial & Parliamentary Affairs)

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Alonzo Fulgham, Acting Administrator

James A. Bever, Director, Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force

United States House of Representatives

John Tanner, Congressman

Brookings Institution

Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institute

The New America Foundation

Peter Bergen, Journalist, Schwartz Senior Fellow, New America Foundation

United States Department of State

Henry S. Ensher, Director, Office of Afghanistan Affairs, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs

Tom Reott, Deputy Director, Office of Afghanistan Affairs, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs

Department of Defense

Michèle Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Christine Wormuth, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas' Security Affairs

David Sedney, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Central Asia

Russell Crandall, Principal Director for Western Hemisphere Initiatives

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

RICK CASSON, M.P.
Chair