

INSIDE DEFENCE TALIBAN RESURGENCE

Before new mission, probe why we failed so miserably in Afghanistan

After years of blood spilled and money spent, the Taliban still controls, influences, or is contesting an estimated one-third of the country.



SCOTT TAYLOR

OTTAWA—Last week the almost-forgotten war in Afghanistan was once more back in the headlines as a result of two United States soldiers being killed in combat.

The incident took place near the northern city of Kunduz, which in recent months has become a hotbed of Taliban activity. The operation was a joint raid by U.S. and Afghan security forces, targeting a couple senior Taliban commanders.

Things somehow went horribly wrong and the U.S.-Afghan army patrol found itself ambushed by a larger Taliban force. In order to extricate themselves from the firefight, the American soldiers called in heavy airstrikes, according to some reports (others said they were from Afghan forces). The allied airstrikes killed about 30 Afghan civilians, many of them women and children, and dozens more innocent bystanders were severely wounded.

Once the combat subsided, the shocked and outraged citizens where the fighting took place gathered up at least a dozen of the bloodied corpses and carried them to the local governor's office to protest the indiscriminate use of lethal force against civilian targets. The U.S. media focus was not on the collateral damage created by the allied airstrikes, but rather it highlighted the two dead and four wounded American soldiers caught in the ambush.

In a statement to the press, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter claimed that "Our service members were doing their part to help Afghans secure their own country while protecting our homeland from those who would do us harm." And boom, there it is.



The last Canadian troops involved in the NATO military training mission board a United States Chinook helicopter on March 12, 2014 in Kabul, Afghanistan. DND photograph courtesy of Patrick Blanchard

The same myth that the tub-thumping Colonel Blimps used in Canada to morally justify our soldiers killing and being killed during the 12 years that we had troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Carter claims to be helping the Afghans, but one has to ask, which Afghans?

The Taliban followers are not aliens; they are Afghans. They controlled most of Afghanistan when the U.S. invaded in 2001, and despite the hundreds of thousands of NATO troops employed, the countless billions of dollars spent, and the endless hours spent training an Afghan security force, the Taliban still controls, influences, or is contesting an estimated one-third of the country.

Were it not for the continued presence of approximately 8,400 U.S. troops and the allied air armada's constant vigil, the Taliban would very quickly depose the hated regime the West installed in Kabul.

Afghans may not all love the

Taliban, but President Ashraf Ghani and his co-ruler, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, are loathed by their citizenry. Having American warplanes blast apart innocent civilians in order to prop up the Kabul regime only intensifies the hatred.

Canadians in Afghanistan suffered 158 soldiers killed and another 2,000 wounded or injured, not including those suffering from unseen mental scars. During the dozen years our soldiers engaged in combat, they too were fighting and killing Afghans who opposed the corrupt cabal of crooks that the U.S.-led alliance installed in Kabul.

Carter's second statement about fighting the enemy in Afghanistan to keep the homeland safe is also a very misleading whopper. The Taliban has never attacked targets outside of its territory in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Truth be told, most of the Taliban's illiterate loyal fol-

lowers likely couldn't find North America on a map.

As for the al-Qaeda evildoers the Americans originally sought to eliminate following the 9/11 attacks, well, that cancer not only spread like wildfire, it has morphed into the even more sinister Daesh.

Before the Canadian government goes running off to commit soldiers to another no-hoper United Nations peacekeeping mission somewhere in Africa, we should commission a full-fledged inquiry into how and why we failed so miserably in Afghanistan.

Of course that will not happen anytime soon, as the Americans keep telling us that they had to kill innocent Afghans in order to save Afghans. Oh yeah, and to keep us safe here at home, from Afghans who have, in fact, never actually done us any harm on our own soil.

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OPINION DEFENCE

Why Canada should re-engage with Afghanistan

Canada should send defence advisers without re-committing more combat troops.



SAKHI NAIMPOOR

Afghanistan and the European Union co-hosted the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan last month, bringing together 75 donor countries, including Canada, that together committed US\$15.2 billion over the next four years. Can Afghanistan remain on a firm path to political and economic stability, state-building, and development, given such a huge influx of cash?

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani delivered a speech that outlined the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, which is a five-year strategic plan for achieving self-reliance. The framework will help Afghanistan meet many challenges, help end gross economic disparity, and ensure the country's security and stability so it moves beyond its history of war and poverty.

The framework provides guidance to the government and other stakeholders. It articulates immediate and long-term development priorities, points to key reforms, and outlines priority investments needed to achieve development goals in these areas.

The framework document notes "It sets the economic, political, and security context for [Afghanistan's] approach to development, which is built around agriculture, extractive industries, and trade." An associated fiscal strategy is meant to guide budgetary allocations to support policy

goals and ensure the good management of public investment.

Although the Afghan government has presented an ambitious plan, the framework is fraught with serious challenges including an overly heavy emphasis on economic development based on foreign investment and a renewed—but mistaken—focus on somehow reforming the federal tax system.

The plan also fails to withstand scrutiny due to the precarious security situation across the country. Taliban attacks have increased significantly including in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan, and opium production has increased 43 per cent since 2015.

Security sector reform needs to be at the core of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan in order to help stem political infighting and enhance co-ordination among the security organs of the state.

Canada's wealth of experience could help turn the tide against extremism and violent attacks. If Canada were to embed security

advisers within the ministries of interior affairs and national defence and the National Directorate of Security in Afghanistan, it could help immeasurably. In tandem with support from other NATO members, Canada should ensure that the Afghan government is able to sustain functioning security apparatuses beyond 2021.

Economic development should be a crucial part of Afghanistan's future developmental goals, but unless there are concrete steps to establish the constitutional rule of law through security sector reform, plans for development will necessarily fall short.

Foreign investors composed of large-scale mining and infrastructure firms remain wary of the security situation and are choosing to reserve their investments because the country's security situation is not improving to satisfactory levels. Without strong action to improve the country's security sector, there can be little hope that foreign investors will choose to reinvest.

The international community allocates money where human capacity is needed, tries to focus on enhancing economic development, and supports bureaucratic reforms where security institutions lack nationwide legitimacy.

Canada also needs to responsibly re-engage Afghanistan from a security viewpoint, by sending defence advisers without re-committing more combat troops. Unless Canada and other NATO allies take stronger steps to reform Afghanistan's security sector, expensive plans to improve the developmental framework could fail, and the West could end up bearing even more of the financial brunt for propping up the Afghan government.

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