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## Canada in Afghanistan: Correcting Mr Harper's Irresponsibility

Canadians are worried about our role in Afghanistan. We all support our brave men and women in uniform wherever they are serving on behalf of Canada. And we owe it to them to ensure that the conditions are such that their work is achieving results. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's accusation that questioning this mission indicates a lack of patriotism and support for our troops is deplorable and unacceptable.

Assume for a moment that we followed Mr. Harper's desire to have Canada fighting in Iraq, a position he advocated in 2003. His judgement in that case has proven to be very poor. If we had followed Mr. Harper into Iraq, would we stay in that quagmire at any cost in order to support our troops? Obviously not. We owe it to ourselves, to the Canadian Forces and to the Afghan people to do our best today to ensure our mission in Afghanistan succeeds—for Afghans, for Canadians and for the international community. I want to propose a principled and constructive way forward.

But first we need to appreciate the history of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.

Canada has a proud history of sending troops to help build peace, security and democracy. This is precisely why we went to Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Both the Chrétien and Martin governments committed Canada to missions in Afghanistan that were consistent with Canada's interests, values, traditions and that would make a real difference for Afghans, for the world and for Canada's security.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the US was attacked by Al Qaeda, a terrorist organization harboured in Afghanistan by the Taliban regime. Shortly thereafter, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which Canada is a founding member, invoked article 5 of its charter--which declares that an attack on one member of the Alliance is an attack on all. This marked the first time in the history of NATO that article 5 had been invoked. The principle underlying article 5---collective security--- is one for which Canada will always stand. Bonded to our allies, we went to Afghanistan under a UN mandate with 31 of our allies.

For six months in 2002, roughly 800 Canadian soldiers joined the international coalition in Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban. In that operation, we lost the lives of four soldiers. Each year on Remembrance Day, I stand with Agatha Dawkins, the mother

of Corporal Ainsworth Dyer from my riding of Saint Laurent Cartierville to remember the sacrifice of our troops.

After the Taliban had been overthrown, the international community had an obligation to remain in Afghanistan to help stabilize and re-build the country—one of the poorest countries in the world, devastated by 30 years of foreign invasions and civil wars. The Bonn Accords provided an international basis for this commitment.

As a result, in February 2003, Prime Minister Chrétien decided that Canada would lead for one year the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the capital, Kabul. This was a multinational force, involving many countries, whose mission was to provide security in the capital, to assist the newly created Afghan Transitional Authority, and to help set the appropriate conditions for presidential and parliamentary elections. Those elections took place successfully and peacefully, thanks in part to the assistance provided by Canada, and resulted in the election of President Hamid Karzai. With 2,000 Canadian troops on the ground and General Hillier commanding the 6,000-strong ISAF force, Canada's effort was, at the time, our most significant mission in decades. Our soldiers did an outstanding job, earning the praise and respect of our allies. During that mission the Canadian Forces suffered three fatalities.

From the outset, the Chrétien government worked hard to secure a replacement nation for Canada, once our one-year ISAF mission ended. Consequently, in 2004 Turkey replaced Canada as the lead nation in ISAF. We were able to reduce our presence on the ground, remaining engaged with about 750 troops, as well as a major development assistance contribution, which by that time had become Canada's largest bilateral development programme in our history. Canada also opened an embassy in Kabul.

Also in 2003, with the support of the Afghan government and the UN, NATO assumed responsibility for the ISAF mission. Shortly thereafter, NATO, again with the full support of the Afghan government, decided to expand its presence outside of Kabul, and gradually expanded its involvement for reconstruction and security throughout all of Afghanistan.

As part of the NATO expansion, Prime Minister Martin decided to establish a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of roughly 250 personnel in Kandahar province. Many countries have PRTs throughout Afghanistan; their mandate is to establish the authority of the Afghan government throughout the country and assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

In addition to the PRT, the Martin government committed a task force of about 1,000 troops to Kandahar for one year, from February 2006 to February 2007, to work with our allies to provide security in this dangerous region, and to facilitate the transition from a US-led mission to a NATO-led one.

The key objective of this mission was first and foremost reconstruction and establishing security, recognizing that we would be undertaking this crucial work in a dangerous

region. The Martin government was under no illusion that this mission would be more dangerous than our previous engagements in Afghanistan. But neither Canada, NATO nor the Americans anticipated how violent and dangerous Kandahar would become in 2006. Describing the insurgency as “persistent, low-level, dirty fighting” General David Richards, until this month the overall commander of the international forces in southern Afghanistan, said in August 2006 that “NATO member states must be more forthcoming in the allocation of troops and equipment.”

Between January and May 2006, 8 soldiers and 1 diplomat were killed. That contrasts sharply with the seven fatalities the Canadian Forces sustained in Afghanistan over the previous four years.

In other words, by May, a mere three months after Canada’s combat force went into Kandahar, the government knew that we were facing a significant and violent insurgency, well beyond anything NATO had experienced in the past or had planned for. And before too long we saw that the Canadian effort in Kandahar had shifted from the original over-riding objective of reconstruction to fighting a violent insurgency.

Faced with that new reality, what should the Canadian government have done? It should have taken the time to determine whether and how our mission could still achieve the goals we had set out, in such a rapidly deteriorating security environment.

Instead, what did Prime Minister Harper do? He extended the mission by 2 years. And he did so without having obtained commitments from our allies to help us cope with the changed situation. He made no prior effort to obtain assurances from the government of Pakistan to secure their border with Afghanistan, across which the insurgents move with impunity. And he got no assurances from our NATO allies to replace Canada at the end of our mission. In other words, he made a rash decision on a critical issue.

In addition, the Prime Minister misled Members of Parliament to get them to support this extension. He promised MPs that this mission would not hinder Canada’s ability to undertake peace-support missions elsewhere, such as in Darfur or Haiti. But within a few weeks of the vote in Parliament, his defence minister made it clear that Canada no longer had any such troop capacity. General Hillier, the Chief of Defence Staff, has more recently confirmed this. With this mission extension, the Prime Minister has thrown away Canada’s flexibility to respond to other international peace and security priorities.

In the face of changed circumstances on the ground, this government and this Prime Minister steamrolled Parliament without facts, information or realistic debate. They told Canadians this mission represented continuity of an existing mission, yet the security context deteriorated so much that shortly after this decision the government went as far as to send tanks to Kandahar.

So that explains where we are today and how we got there. What about the way forward?

The situation is very dangerous in Kandahar. The Taliban, a highly radical ideological group that conducts guerrilla operations and suicide bombings, is not the only threat that we are facing.

The population is armed and endemic violence erupts in the form of banditry and violent quarrels between families and clans. Warlords exercise, in some parts of the country, more control than the government of Afghanistan. At least half of Afghanistan's economy is dependent on the illegal drug trade, breeding more violence and corruption. The border with Pakistan is porous, making counter insurgency operations much more difficult.

The four issues that need to be addressed are the following. First, we need to clarify our commitment. Second, we need to better integrate our military and aid efforts in Kandahar. Third, we need to focus on the very salient problem of the opium economy. And fourth, we must address the chronic fresh water shortage.

Canada is in Afghanistan as part of a coalition, and there is little it can decide or do alone. Even if we knew precisely what the best plan would be to rebuild and secure Afghanistan, we would still have to convince our allies and the Kabul government. Diplomacy must therefore be Canada's first line of action. And it is precisely in diplomacy that the Harper government has, through neglect, or ideology, proved itself incapable of directing a policy that is consistent with Canada's values and interests.

Today Canada carries a heavy burden in Afghanistan. Canada and five other NATO countries, out of a 26-member Alliance, are engaged in the southern part of Afghanistan, the most dangerous and unstable region of the country. The European states with the largest armies—France, Germany, Italy and Spain--are unwilling to shoulder their share of the burden in the south. This has been a longstanding problem for NATO. If our efforts in the region are to be successful, we need more countries to be involved in combat and reconstruction operations in southern Afghanistan and a better coordination of these efforts. I will engage real diplomatic efforts with our NATO allies to share the burden in the south of Afghanistan. I will also press Islamabad and Washington to do more in order to stop the infiltration of fighters across the border and to arrest the Taliban leadership in Pakistan.

In a recent unanimous interim report (Canadian Troops in Afghanistan: Taking a Hard Look at a Hard Mission), the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence recommends that Canada "reconsiders its commitment unless NATO, within the next 12 months, puts into place in Kandahar a significantly larger and fully-engaged stability force".

I agree with the Senate committee. I would add that I would retain the current number of Canadian troops in Afghanistan until 2009, but I would reserve the option of redeploying our combat task force into other under-resourced and critical functions in Afghanistan, such as additional training the Afghan National Army. These troops could also be deployed as additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

Also, I will say unequivocally that a Liberal government led by me will not extend Canada's combat mission in Kandahar beyond February 2009. That means Canada must inform NATO today how firm this deadline is and that it must find a replacement nation for us. The Harper government has not done this. To the contrary, military documents have come to light that show that the Harper government is planning for the Canadian Forces to stay in Kandahar until 2011. Our allies have surely taken note of this. As long as other NATO countries believe our commitment is open-ended, they will never prepare for our departure.

Progress in Afghanistan will come only if the international aid is provided with a long term strategy. We should design our two-year mission with that in mind.

The basic goal for Canada in Kandahar should be to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. We certainly do not win hearts and minds by telling the Afghans that we are in their country for reasons of retribution, as Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor has recently stated.

We should not believe that military action to restore security is something that must precede the reconstruction and economic development work in Kandahar province, or that such development efforts cannot be undertaken until the region has been completely pacified. Reconstruction work needs the protection of the military, but it will never happen if full security is a prerequisite. Conversely, reconstruction contributes to improving security. Afghans living in this insecure region will be most likely to stop supporting the insurgents if they are able to observe tangible progress in their daily lives.

Our soldiers are right to believe that to make a population secure, there is a need to establish relationships of trust with them. This is why we need to combine, more than we are doing today, our military, development and diplomatic efforts in Kandahar. Currently, total coalition spending on military operations in Afghanistan outpaces spending on development and reconstruction by 900%. Today, only 20% of Canada's development assistance to Afghanistan is spent in Kandahar. This imbalance must be corrected.

The local population must be able to identify our soldiers and our country with the reconstruction efforts. The Afghan people need to see new schools, hospitals and government buildings, not just tanks.

But in doing so, we must avoid the following mistake. In combining our military, aid and diplomatic efforts in Kandahar, we must not lead people to believe that the battle against the Taliban, the protection of villages, the construction of schools and road repairs, are entirely the responsibility of foreigners. What is needed instead is to assign as much responsibility as possible to Afghan soldiers, police and officials. Canada should provide much more training assistance to Afghanistan's army, national police, lawyers and judges. We should never forget that the primary condition for a successful international intervention in Afghanistan is that it should contribute to the establishment of a functional Afghan state.

Let me give you a good example of how we can work better, both for Afghans and with Afghans: the compelling need to provide basic health services to the people. Every 30

minutes, an Afghan woman dies from pregnancy related causes. These are amongst the worst maternal health indicators on earth. One in four children born in Afghanistan will die before the age of five. Nearly half of the country's population cannot expect to live beyond the age of 45.

With so much military presence on the ground, with so much development money committed, it is simply unacceptable that 5 years after the overthrow of the Taliban, 85% of Afghan households still do not have access to iodized salt, a key element to ensure proper growth in children. Clearly we can do much better and work with the Afghan government to increase the production and distribution of iodized salt and fortified flour.

Another example is polio. Together, humanity nearly eradicated polio from the face of the earth. Yet, polio is on the rise in Afghanistan! Surely, we can do more and assist the Afghan government in increasing and accelerating vaccination campaigns.

Our goal must be to improve the security and living conditions of the Afghan people and their own capacity to take care of themselves.

But Afghanistan will not be a stable functional state as long as over half of its economy is dependent on the illegal drug trade. Canada should take the next two years of its mission to make significant progress on this front. The illegal revenue generated by the growing of poppies partly finances the Taliban, but also common criminals. To improve security for Afghans, an effective strategy needs to be found to combat this plague. The current policy by some of our Allies of attempting to destroy the crops is ineffective. It raises opium prices and creates further incentives for growing poppies in other regions. Its main impact on security is negative, by generating hostility among the farmers against the Afghan authorities and against foreigners who are destroying their main source of income. We need to find better solutions and Prime Minister Harper's government has failed to propose alternatives.

I propose two strategies that NATO and the international community should seriously consider. First, a form of poppy control that would avoid harming the local farmers and destroying their crops, but would target only the processing laboratories and transportation networks; perhaps purchasing the product in some regions; and certainly encouraging different crops, through loans to farmers, or creating a marketing infrastructure for their products at prices guaranteed by a public agency.

Second, over the long term, I propose that Canada helps fund the latest pilot project from the Senlis Council to use the poppy crop for medicinal purposes. This new proposal calls for the transformation of the poppy into morphine or codeine in the villages where the crops are grown to then be sold legally in the international market. Such a licensed cultivation would ensure that profits from medicine sales remain in the village and offer farmers a real and profitable alternative to the heroin trade.

Like everything associated with Afghanistan, there are risks and uncertainties associated with the Senlis plan, particularly with respect to the transportation of the finished product. That is why it is important that this start as a pilot project in a limited area. This will give us the opportunity to study its efficacy. If we do not start to think creatively about the problem of the drug economy, the situation will never get

better. This program would have the double benefit of addressing the global shortage of these painkillers but would also generate legal economic activity in the country.

Afghanistan has some of the most serious challenges of any country in the world with respect to access to fresh water. Even if there was not an insurgency crisis, this problem would exist. UNICEF estimates that only 13% of the population was using improved drinking water sources in 2002 and there are indications that the number has fallen over the past few years. Afghanistan's geography is not conducive to the production of fresh surface water and groundwater is slow to recharge. Kandahar especially is a drought region.

Constant violence over the past thirty years has had a disastrous impact on infrastructure such as water reservoirs and canals. The impact of this destruction has been an acute water shortage that is particularly felt in the agricultural sector. Poppies are one of the few crops that can survive in the arid climate without proper irrigation. When we speak of the need for crop substitution in Afghanistan, we must understand that this needs to include a sizable investment in modern irrigation infrastructure.

To date, Canada has pledged just \$3.1 million in irrigation infrastructure in Kandahar. This must increase dramatically. Canada is uniquely positioned to address this destabilising long-term strain and serious challenge to peace and a functional government. Canadians have previously brought this expertise to drought-stricken regions in Africa. We must now do the same in Afghanistan.

A Liberal government led by me will unequivocally commit to ending Canada's mission in Kandahar in 2009 and we will inform NATO of this deadline right away to ensure they find a replacement for Canada.

I would retain the current number of Canadian troops in Afghanistan until 2009, but I would reserve the option, prior to 2009, of redeploying Canada's troops to other under-resourced and critical functions in Afghanistan, such as additional training of the Afghan National Army and additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

Between now and 2009, a Liberal government I lead will adopt a more integrated strategy in Kandahar, with a greater development and diplomatic thrust, and a real effort to win the hearts and minds of Afghan. We will support innovative measures to move Afghanistan's economy to a more legitimate base and to improve the living conditions of the Afghan people. Ultimately, that is how you permanently defeat violent extremists in a poor disadvantaged country. The Taliban will not be defeated solely through the barrel of a gun.

And finally, a government led by me will dispense with the incendiary language of the Harper government that suggests Canada is in Afghanistan for retribution for 9/11. Not only does such talk make it harder to win hearts and minds, it is dangerous and irresponsible. By establishing a timeline for our involvement there, by insisting other nations share a greater part of the burden, by better integrating our military, diplomatic and development efforts, by helping the Afghan government take more responsibility, and by addressing the opium economy and water challenges, Canada will have a responsible strategy in Afghanistan.

For the time being, I call on the Harper government to cooperate with the Parliamentary hearings that have been called by the Liberal members of the Foreign Affairs Committee. These hearings offer the opportunity for Canadians, through their Parliamentarians, to receive vital information about the mission and assess its efficacy in achieving goals that are consistent with Canadian values and principles. It could also be a forum to engage the over 60,000 strong Afghan community in Canada. We must harness their knowledge of the country, their connections and their abilities to help build a better future for Afghanistan.