



CANADA, KANDAHAR AND THE CASPIAN Facts about the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

The Government of Canada has sent 2,250 Canadian soldiers to be stationed in Kandahar Afghanistan. The soldiers will be fighting alongside about 8,000 US soldiers and are under the command of Operation Archer in support of the US led "Operation Enduring Freedom". It is expected that command of the Canadian units will shift to NATO control by 2007.

Canada will be operating along the southern border between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Kandahar province. This is a crucial area for two reasons: it is the location of Taliban strongholds and it is the proposed route for the multibillion dollar Trans-Afghan pipeline. It is no secret that since the collapse of the Soviet Union US oil companies have been keen to exploit Caspian Sea oil and gas. They lobbied the Clinton administration to have a pipeline built from Turkmenistan in the north through Afghanistan to ports in Pakistan. They see even more opportunity with George Bush as president. Afghanistan is important to US oil Companies because it is the only route that would provide total control for them. The other possible routes for the pipeline run through Iran, an enemy of the US, China, a competitor of the US, or Russia, an unreliable and heavily armed ally.

The Department of National Defence says that Canadians, and the other international forces, are there to "reinforce the authority of the Afghan government in and around Kandahar and help local authorities stabilize and rebuild the region." Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan is considered a US puppet by most Afghans. His authority outside Kabul is merely symbolic. Local control in the provinces is left to a mix of opium gangsters, former Taliban commanders and tribal elders. Mark Schneider, president of International Crisis Group has said, "It's not merely about drug money financing candidates. Drug lords are candidates."

The United States and the Karzai Administration are, in most cases, happy to work and make deals with these local rulers. According to Human Rights Watch

the majority (60%) of those elected to the Afghan parliament in the October, 18, 2005 elections were these local criminals and power brokers or their associates.

US forces and allied local warlords are responsible for human rights abuses in the country. According to Human Rights Watch:

U.S. forces operating against Taliban insurgents continue to generate numerous claims of human rights abuses against the civilian population, including arbitrary arrests, use of excessive force, and mistreatment of detainees...

Local military and police forces, even in Kabul, have been involved in arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, extortion, torture, and extrajudicial killings of criminal suspects. Outside Kabul, commanders and their troops in many areas have been implicated in widespread rape of women, girls, and boys, murder, illegal detention, forced displacement, and other specific abuses against women and children, including human trafficking and forced marriage.

According to General Rick Hillier, Canadians are going to Afghanistan to "Kill detestable murderers and scumbags". The reality is that we are going to support, some of the worst human rights abusers the country has ever seen. This deadly combination of abuses by both US forces and their local allies ensures that Canadians will continue to face growing resistance from the Afghan people.

State of Reconstruction

We are told that the Canadian soldiers will be engaging in development work as part of their mission. This type of intervention, generally referred to as the 3-D approach (disarmament, diplomacy and development) has come under heavy criticism from NGOs for confusing the process and endangering aid workers. It is argued that having the development component so intertwined with the defense operation results in corruption and

the use of development initiatives as bribes to local authorities and civilians. It also eliminates the possibility of development work being neutral in the conflict.

According to a report in the Guardian, Vickie Hawkins, acting head of the Médecin Sans Frontières mission in Afghanistan said the international humanitarian group left Afghanistan for these very reasons.

The US-led coalition has made the situation worse by blurring the line between humanitarian work and military operations. During the war in 2001, Hawkins said, US soldiers were driving around in civilian clothes in white cars, taking on the appearance of humanitarian aid workers. In May, the Pentagon was forced to apologize for dropping leaflets in southern Afghanistan which promised humanitarian assistance if local people gave the coalition information about the Taliban and al-Qaida.

She despaired that military campaigns were employing "hearts and minds" strategies more and more often, making it difficult for aid workers to maintain their aura of all-important impartiality. If armies are handing out food assistance and medical equipment, it becomes harder for locals to tell the aid workers from the occupiers.

Opium

Revenue from poppy cultivation – between \$2-3 billion annually – is now double the amount of international aid. Ironically, the money coming from opium production is now the chief source of "reconstruction funds" in the country.

Afghan farmers have little option but to produce poppies and will continue to do so. It is the only crop that will generate enough money to survive on. The British Government, worried that most of the heroin ending up on UK streets came from Afghanistan, began an eradication program for poppy cultivation. Afghan farmers were



promised aid and new seeds in return for ending their production but the aid never arrived and many have returned to poppy cultivation. Attempts at a new eradication program will likely end in conflict unless there is a real commitment to provide viable alternatives to the farmers.

Frasier Nelson, a Scottish journalist, summarizes the contradiction, "Today, some two million Afghans rely on opium poppies for their livelihood, generating \$2.7 billion of illegal wealth. They will not give this up readily, nor will the farmers whose desire to feed their families is stronger than their desire to placate NATO."¹

British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that, "The Taliban regime is funded in large part on the drug trade – 90% of all heroin sold in Britain originates from Afghanistan. Stopping that trade is directly in our interests." The Taliban has many faults but by May 2001 it had virtually eradicated opium production. The resurgence in poppy production is a consequence of the US invasion and continuing occupation.

Canadian Corporations in the Caspian

According to the Energy Information Administration there are proven reserves of between 17 and 44 billion barrels of oil and 232 trillion cubic feet of gas in the Caspian region. Production of these reserves is very limited. As of 2004 only

about 11% of the regions gas reserves, which equal those of Saudi Arabia, were under production.

On December 27, 2002 Afghanistan Pakistan and Turkmenistan signed an agreement to build a 1,500 kilometer long Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline – a \$3.2 billion project expected to deliver 30 Billion cubic meters of natural gas a year. The only stumbling block to finally realizing this deal is the lack of stability in Afghanistan.

In September 2004 a joint Omani-Canadian delegation led by Yusuf bin Alavi, foreign minister of Oman, and Jean Chretien, former Prime Minister of Canada, met in Turkmenistan to negotiate a deal between Edmonton based Buried Hill Energy and the government of Turkmenistan to develop the Serdar block in the Caspian area. This is not the first or only time that the former Prime Minister, a man responsible for sending thousands of Canadian soldiers to Afghanistan, has intervened on behalf of Canadian corporations for contracts in the area.² On the same trip Chretien met with Saparmurat Niyazov, the self proclaimed president for life of Turkmenistan, and discussed potential involvement from Canadian corporations in the Trans-Afghan pipeline.³ On October 20 2004 Thermo Design received a contract worth \$42 million for the production of an LPG and gas condensate plant in Turkmenistan that

would produce 50,000 tons of LPG and 200,000 tons of condensate gas (light gasoline) annually.⁴

The hypocrisy of signing multi-million dollar deals with one of the worst human rights abusers in the region⁵ while simultaneously arguing that Canada's soldiers are bringing peace is obvious. It is also standard operating procedure for successive governments of Canada to ignore issues of Human rights if there is money to be made in international deals. These facts call into question the real reasons why Canada is in Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan want peace. The occupiers and their puppet and former Unocal employee, Hamid Karzai want oil. We have seen the US and its Allies in this scenario before. Whether in Chile in 1973 when the US sponsored a coup to make sure that the copper mines were not nationalized or in Iraq where they have killed more than a million people to control the oil resources they will brutally enforce a corrupt and divisive political process to keep the people divided so they can pillage the land of its resources. They don't care who is in power or what type of society they are creating. In this case they are building a society based on corruption, drugs and violence. Canada is now the cop trying to impose these realities on the people of Afghanistan.

¹ <http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/opinion.cfm?id=144412006>

² <http://www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1140>

³ <http://www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=876>

⁴ <http://www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=959>

⁵ For More discussion on this see Human Rights Watch's Turkmenistan resources at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/turkme12244.htm>

Further Reading

For further information on the current situation in Afghanistan see:

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (www.rawa.org)

Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)

Afghan Women's Mission (afghanwomensmission.org/index.php)

Detestable Murderers and Scumbags, Canada in Afghanistan by Justin Podur and Sonali Kolhatkar

(<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=9268>)

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