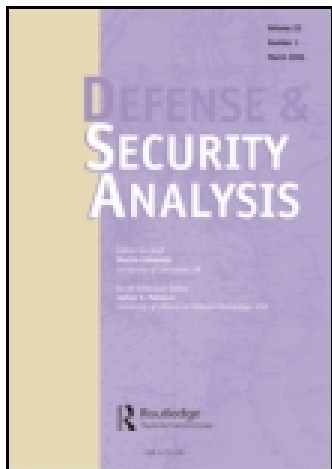


This article was downloaded by: [Royal Military College of Canada]

On: 16 October 2014, At: 04:17

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:  
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Defense & Security Analysis

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cdan20>

### Blood on the Ground: Canada and the Southern Campaign in Afghanistan

Sean M. Maloney<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Royal Military College of Canada, PO Box 17000, Station Forces, Kingston, Ontario, K7K 7B4, Canada

Published online: 30 Mar 2008.

To cite this article: Sean M. Maloney (2007) Blood on the Ground: Canada and the Southern Campaign in Afghanistan, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 23:4, 405-417, DOI: [10.1080/14751790701752444](https://doi.org/10.1080/14751790701752444)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14751790701752444>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# Blood on the Ground: Canada and the Southern Campaign in Afghanistan

*Sean M. Maloney*

Royal Military College of Canada, PO Box 17000, Station Forces, Kingston, Ontario,  
K7K 7B4, Canada

For the Americans, it's no longer just "boots on the ground": it's blood on the ground that counts.

Joel J. Sokolsky

Once again, media portrayal of the war in Afghanistan has lazily fallen back on false historical analogies and predictions of doom. After a protracted suicide bomb campaign and the fierce back and forth battle over the Panjwayi and Zharey districts west of Kandahar, the Taliban are "resurgent"; it is Vietnam all over again and the United States and NATO are "losing" the war.<sup>1</sup> Certain senior NATO commanders, seeking to draw attention to the need for more resources, have also engaged in hyperbole, thus fueling misperceptions that imminent failure is on the horizon.<sup>2</sup> Alternately, we see a continuing absence of logic in the bombardment of criticism that the international effort is too focused on military operations and not enough on "reconstruction", and this is the root cause of our "failure."<sup>3</sup>

All is not well: there are significant problems and the enemy is succeeding in critical areas, particularly in information operations. The Taliban and its allies have also improved operationally, though not as dramatically as depicted in the media. There is, however, little or no American coverage of what is going on in southern Afghanistan, particularly the operations of the lead nation in southern Afghanistan, Canada, and the other nations engaged in this fight. Totally overlooked by American and British professional military commentators, and generally ignored by American and British media outlets who are focused on their own national problems in-theatre, the combination of neglect has resulted in a distorted impression of exactly what is going on in southern Afghanistan and why.

But all is not lost. Combined Task Force Aegis, a multi-national brigade predominantly based on American, British, Canadian and Dutch forces and led by Canada, held the line during the vital transition from the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom control to the NATO International Security Assistance Force. The Taliban and its allies

have not seized control of southern Afghanistan, let alone the rest of the country. They have, however, mounted a serious challenge to the Karzai government, its allies, and those Afghans who do not desire a return to radical Islam.<sup>4</sup>

## CANADA IN AFGHANISTAN

Canada has been continuously engaged in military operations in Afghanistan since 2001, though this engagement has taken many forms as Canada has worked with both international coalitions, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Canada first engaged with OEF in the fall of 2001 by sending a naval task force to the Indian Ocean to conduct leadership interdiction operations.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, special operations forces deployed to Afghanistan, followed by a light infantry battalion that was integrated into an American airborne brigade in 2002. When the battalion was withdrawn, Canadians remained with OEF in a staff and training capacity, working to develop a plan for the future Afghan National Army.

In broad terms, the ISAF formed in 2002, was a “fig leaf” to facilitate UN and Non Governmental Organisations’ (NGO) involvement in the stabilization effort: these organizations did not want to be under American military command or have any relationship to it.<sup>6</sup> When it became clear that OEF was not structured nor equipped to stabilize the bulk of the retaken countryside and that the United States were committing to Iraq *en masse*, a solution was needed. The Europeans who led ISAF, however, balked at expanding ISAF outside of Kabul. Canada agreed to lead ISAF, but only if it were “NATO-ized”. In part, this move was designed to stave off domestic criticism regarding Canada’s planned military commitment to Operation Iraqi Freedom, a commitment that was subsequently canceled in favor of an Afghanistan deployment.

As a result, a Canadian brigade headquarters, a battlegroup, and special operations forces deployed to Kabul in 2003–4 to affect this changeover. Canadian trainers remained with OEF’s Afghan National Army training program. While in ISAF lead, Canadian commanders formalized several important stabilization programs, including the disarmament and demobilization of factional armies, and ISAF provincial reconstruction team expansion into northern Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Canadian commanders also identified a key problem: the new Afghan government lacked the capacity to govern. An ISAF team was established to assist with this area.

Working under a severe manpower shortage that was the result of short-sighted reductions to the forces in the mid-1990s, Canada could not sustain command of ISAF and so relinquished it in 2004. Certain Canadian sub-units remained in Kabul, however, and were instrumental in working with American and British units to prevent interference with the 2004 elections. Canadian Embedded Training Teams were once again significant contributors to assisting the Afghan National Army.<sup>8</sup>

The stabilization effort in the country was attenuated by an unwillingness of Western European countries to commit to lead and support Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in the wake of the controversy over the American decision to remove the Hussein regime in Iraq. Shamed into taking PRT leads, most European countries scrambled to accept “safe” PRTs outside of volatile southern and eastern Afghanistan. During the scramble, indecisiveness within the Canadian policy establishment prevented a timely

decision and the only PRT that was left was in Kandahar province, then in the OEF operating area. Canada decided to accept control of the Kandahar PRT in 2005. Working with TF Bayonet, an American brigade, it became clear to commanders that the situation in the south was deteriorating. Previous American commands had not been aggressive enough at pushing PRT operations through the vital province and critical monies needed for the stabilization effort were not making it south from Kabul.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the European-led ISAF had backed off on Canadian plans to assist the Afghan government when they took control of ISAF in 2004. When Canada deployed its PRT, another Canadian organization, the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan (SAT-A), stood up in Kabul in mid-2005. The SAT-A worked closely with the Afghan government to formulate the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). The ANDS was critical in that the IMF would not seriously invest in Afghanistan without a plan, and one that had accountability at that.<sup>10</sup>

Information developed by the Kandahar PRT and the SAT-A highlighted a number of problems. First, the enemy forces altered their activities in Kandahar province. In mid-2005, the Taliban and Al Qaeda initiated a suicide bombing campaign. Suicide bombings were not new in Afghanistan: OEF and ISAF forces had been hit before. But the sharp increase in the number of attacks and their locality brought significant media and analytical attention to the international effort in Afghanistan and, inevitably, Iraq comparisons were made. The possibility that a surge in Taliban and Al Qaeda violence might interfere with IMF investment became very real.

At the same time, OEF and NATO had been negotiating for an incremental handover of Afghan regions. RC North and RC West were at this point under ISAF control. Ostensibly, American troop requirements in Iraq were driving these handovers, but there may have been other reasons which remain unclear right now. The next region, RC South, became problematic. It was not “safe” like RC North and RC West. Would NATO members commit forces to RC South, a sector that had an escalating insurgency? It was unclear. Delay in the ISAF expansion plan would be seen as a coalition failure and play into the hands of enemy information operations. The split command system in Afghanistan (ISAF and OEF) was inefficient in that there was no singular plan for the country and each organization had its own distinct operating methods, a situation which the enemy exploited by hiding between the “seams” of the two coalitions.<sup>11</sup>

As it had before, in the pre-NATO ISAF to NATO ISAF transition, Canada decided to commit forces to command RC South in its OEF incarnation, and then handle the transition to ISAF command. The objective was to facilitate the inclusion of other NATO countries into the RC South fight.<sup>12</sup> The Canadian commitment included a Canadian-led multinational brigade HQ, a battle group, special operations forces, and the PRT. When the commitment was made in 2005, the only other partner was the United States. It took significant cajoling to get the United Kingdom and the Netherlands engaged. The UK was already deeply engaged in Iraq and had a “safe” PRT in RC North. The Dutch initially committed to a PRT in Oruzgan province and decided to bring special operations forces and a battlegroup, but domestic political debate nearly scuttled the whole deal, mostly because the Dutch were also committed to Iraq and because of the potential of casualties from the suicide bombing campaign. There

was even concern in late 2005 that a negative Dutch decision would cascade and produce a negative British decision. In the end, however, both countries committed their forces to RC South under Canadian command.<sup>13</sup>

### THE SITUATION IN LATE 2005

When the Canadian PRT arrived in the summer of 2005, Combined Task Force (CTF) Bayonet, based on the 173rd Airborne Brigade, had been at war for six months. CTF Bayonet consisted of two small American infantry battalions with Afghan National Army augmentation, an independent company group, a helicopter battalion, a Romanian battalion for air field protection, and PRTs in Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabol provinces.

Enemy activity varied province by province. For the most part, there were small Taliban groups in north-west Helmand, and across the mountainous northern portions of Kandahar and Zabol provinces. These groups conducted periodic harassment ambushes and laid improvised explosive devices (IED). The level of political mobilization appears to have remained limited to these rural areas. There was significant enemy activity in and around Kandahar City, however. The built-up agricultural districts of Panjwayi and Zharey hosted a number of cells that regularly ambushed coalition forces along the east-west highway to Helmand, while a suicide IED network was particularly active in the city itself. Political mobilization was under way in the southern parts of the city, and sporadic rocket attacks were conducted against the main OEF base at Kandahar Air Field to keep the coalition's heads down. Coalition special operations forces were working in operating areas in Oruzgan province and northern Helmand, as well as along the border with Pakistan; there were also significant engagements in southern Oruzgan in the inter-provincial border region with the northern part of Kandahar province and northern Zabol.<sup>14</sup>

CTF Bayonet's operational focus was to keep the pressure on the fairly small number of Taliban groups operating in these northern areas and maintain a dispersed presence on infiltration routes leading from Pakistan through the eastern districts of Kandahar into Zabol, while at the same time mentoring Afghan National Army units to replace American units in the holding role in Zabol province. It is clear that CTF Bayonet was stretched thin, given the terrain it had to operate in and its small size.

CTF Bayonet inherited what they described as a dysfunctional aid and reconstruction situation. The American PRTs suffered from a number of deficiencies. Each PRT had limited protective resources and was unable to move into the rugged hinterland of the provinces without being escorted by the already limited number of maneuver units who were engaged in pinning down Taliban groups in the northern parts of the provinces. There was some tension in how to employ the PRT: was it there to support the brigade like a CA unit? Was it there to coordinate aid and construction? What should the relationship be between the PRT and the provincial government? There was much unco-ordinated aid and construction activity going on in the region and it was not clear exactly what effect this was having – or was supposed to have – on the counter-insurgency effort. It was possible the enemy was even benefiting from the aid effort in the areas in which they operated.<sup>15</sup>

The Canadian PRT immediately set to work in laying the ground for the fall 2005 provincial elections. CTF Bayonet and the PRT understood that the key to any aid and reconstruction effort was information. PRT operations focused on long range patrols into the more remote districts to assess what exactly was going on. There were no indications that previous PRTs had even visited these areas. Special operations forces had, but the limited co-ordination between the CJSOTF and the conventional forces in Afghanistan blocked or filtered the passage of information. Information from the Canadian PRT, developed over months, indicated that the enemy was engaged in much more infiltration from Pakistan than had been believed – and not always in the areas the analysts predicted. Enemy religious/political mobilization was under way in the rural areas: it was not possible to tell whether this had dramatically increased or not because there was no real baseline.<sup>16</sup>

The Canadian PRT was extremely active in promoting capacity-building with the provincial government. It was critical that there be accountable government institutions before any NGO or international organization (IO) would commit funds for aid and construction at the provincial level. Little had been done before 2005 in this area, thus the lack of focus for the disparate construction effort.

The enemy suicide bombing campaign was a significant distraction. It served to attract media attention to Kandahar City; it forced greater protective measures which in turn reduced the effectiveness of the assessment and capacity-building effort; it also distracted “eyes and ears” that could have been out in the hinterland finding out what was going on. In January 2006, however, PRT work was further attenuated when a senior Canadian diplomat working in the capacity-building part of the PRT was assassinated by a suicide VBIED. Canadian aid organizations, who were already skittish about working with the PRT, used this event as an excuse not to continue work for a critical time. The suicide campaign continued, emboldened by this success.<sup>17</sup>

### **CTF AEGIS DEPLOYS: 2006**

CTF Aegis replaced CTF Bayonet in January/February 2006. For a time, Aegis commanded only two maneuver units: Task Force Orion, a Canadian battle group equipped with LAV-III armored vehicles, and a reduced American battalion group, Task Force Warrior mounted in armored Hummers. There was an American helicopter battalion and a Romanian battalion protecting Kandahar Air Field, as it had since 2003. CTF Aegis also took over command of the existing PRTs: Canada continued on in Kandahar, while the Americans continued with Zabol. The British and Dutch contingents took several months to deploy, but would handle Helmand and Oruzgan provinces respectively. Special operations forces continued to operate in northern Helmand and in Oruzgan, but had withdrawn from the Pakistan border regions by the summer of 2006.<sup>18</sup>

CTF Aegis’s concept of operation had a number of attributes. First, the PRTs were to be twinned with the maneuver battalions in each province. The PRTs would be in the lead, with the battalions in support of the aid and construction effort. Part of the plan involved assigning an Afghan National Army (ANA) battalion to each coalition battalion so that it could be mentored and ultimately become responsible for security.

It is important to note that none of this precluded offensive operations against insurgents when they were discovered. It was, however, based on the assumption that the enemy was conducting operations as they had in 2005: dispersed rural operations, religious/political mobilization, and urban suicide terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

As an OEF formation, CTF Aegis was subject to command from Combined Joint Task Force-76, which was based on the divisional HQ from 10th Mountain Division. This relationship posed some problems. The American HQ was not used to commanding a Canadian-led formation and expected it to behave as any other American brigade would, that is, be responsive to higher direction and not think for itself. The compartmentalization within CJTF-76 between conventional and special operations forces also aggravated the relationship. The Canadian view of command is that a higher headquarters provides a general operational concept and the subordinate formation figures out how to use its resources to achieve the aim because it knows the terrain and the people better than the higher headquarters. In this case, CJTF-76 planners developed an overly-detailed division plan (Operation Mountain Thrust) in which the actions of CTF Aegis were ostensibly orchestrated alongside RC East, air support, CJSOTF, and other special operations capabilities, without CTF Aegis having visibility on many of these activities which were conducted inside their battlespace.

There were detrimental effects on the conduct of the counter-insurgency campaign. Certain unco-ordinated non-Canadian assets would conduct “kinetic” operations in the CTF Aegis AOR and then leave the area. CTF Aegis would have to clean up afterwards and suffer the wrath of upset locals who did not distinguish between those assets and CTF Aegis units. Canada was unwilling to publicly take the blame for these incidents because of the potential for domestic political backlash, something the United States is used to but Canada is not.

The CTF Aegis concept of operations was in conflict with what CJTF-76 wanted it to do. The CJTF-76 plan for 2006 was focused on reduction of what its staff referred to as “Taliban sanctuaries” in the rural, northern parts of Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabol provinces. This reflects, in general, a doctrinal disagreement on the nature of counter-insurgency. Is the threat best addressed by the reduction of enemy forces, or through shielded aid and construction efforts designed to get the population on side? The CJTF-76 plan seems to have focused on the former and paid lip service to the latter, instead of recognizing that both are important, so when the enemy shifted its approach in the summer of 2006, rapid unprogramed shifts had to be made.

It appears as though the CJTF-76 plan did not address a number of important variables, specifically the Dutch and British laydown that was under way throughout the spring and summer of 2006. The logistical process of getting the Dutch Task Force to Oruzgan and the British Task Force out to Helmand was dependent on controlling the main service routes from Kandahar Air Field, through Kandahar City, and then north to Tarin Kowt in Oruzgan and west along Highway 1 past Zharey district and on to Helmand province. With only two battalions, and each of them assigned to separate provinces, CTF Aegis could not be everywhere at once. TF Orion was particularly stretched thin: Kandahar province is nearly twice as large as Zabol, where the American battalion was operating. TF Orion also had to handle a major city, whereas Qalat is much smaller.

TF Orion was, through exceptional “can-do” leadership, able to establish forward operating bases on the main service routes and facilitate the Dutch and British deployments, while at the same time the force was under pressure from CJTF-76 to root out Taliban sanctuaries in the north. How was this to be achieved? The enemy in the supposed sanctuaries dispersed whenever TF Orion deployed forces into the northern areas.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, a significant suicide IED network was rounded up which reduced, for a time, attacks in Kandahar City itself along the British and Dutch deployment routes. In time, TF Orion was forced to take over from an allied special operations force unit operating in and around the vital Spinboldak border area, which stretched the task force resources even further. Note that there was little time to focus on aid and reconstruction efforts because the PRT was dependent on the TF Orion battlegroup for protection and they were busy elsewhere.

### THE SUMMER BATTLES

The enemy, of course, was not interested in adhering to any coalition plan or conceptualization dealing with counter-insurgency in RC South during the summer of 2006. While TF Orion was deployed in northern Kandahar in accordance with the CJTF-76 sanctuaries reduction plan, information was received that Taliban forces were building up in the Panjwayi and Zharey districts. This area was already a problem and had been during the CTF Bayonet days as ambush cells sporadically interfered with traffic on Highway 1. The new concern was related to the “Tet Thesis” in which the Taliban was believed to be planning to infiltrate Kandahar City from Panjwayi and Zharey districts in order to conduct a series of “spectaculars” against high-value government targets. TF Orion troops were withdrawn from the north in mid-June and went into Zharey district to disrupt the Taliban build-up. This effort collaterally assisted with the British deployment to Helmand by securing Highway 1. The British situation became problematic very quickly.

After the bulk of TF Orion re-deployed to northern Kandahar, British forces encountered significant resistance as they sought to exert a presence in Helmand province. Based on a parachute battalion with associated helicopter support, the Helmand Task Force was supposed to deploy into dispersed operating locations and connect with the local population. These locations quickly came under attacks conducted with a level of tactical sophistication unseen in the other Regional Command (RC) South provinces. A great deal of effort was spent trying to account for this state of affairs, but the sensitivities of the facts were unpalatable to some analysts because of the larger implications.

Helmand province is essentially one big poppy field. Poppy production touches practically every economic endeavor in Helmand. Up to the deployment of the Helmand Task Force in 2006, the only coalition presence was the American PRT and some special operations forces which were not interested in narcotics-related issues. In Afghanistan, there are competing views on how to approach aid and reconstruction. The British policy, and the US State Department policy, is to support poppy eradication and “alternative livelihood” crop programs. In this view, monies derived from poppy production support the Taliban war effort and enhance corruption in the



emergent Afghan governance structures. The alternative view, held by the US Department of Defense and Canada, is that narcotics reduction is not a military matter, and that stability needs to exist in a region first before policing can take place. That policing has to be done by the Afghans and not coalition forces. Poppy eradication attacks the economic basis of society in Helmand which, in turn, leads to more Taliban recruits and influence, or other forms of resistance, which are not necessarily Taliban-controlled but can result in pinning down scarce coalition resources.

What the British encountered in Helmand was a combination of forces working against them. There were already Taliban cells operating there. There are narcotics producers that have infiltrated and even control portions of the Afghan security forces. There are family and tribal groupings that have relatives in both the Taliban and in the security forces, and who also produce poppy. Yet there are narcotics producers who despise the Taliban and the government equally. The possibility that elements within the government are engaged in poppy production cannot be ruled out. The situation defies easy explanation. Indeed, part of the problem is that the US State Department reneged on aid money for the region back in 2003, when they believed that it would go to the wrong people; this led to a loss of credibility for the coalition years ago. Afghans have long memories. To make matters even more interesting, Helmand serves as an alternative Taliban infiltration route from Pakistan all the way into Oruzgan.

The British force structure for Helmand was not optimal. Equipped with unarmored Land Rovers (and later semi-armored Land Rovers) and dependent on helicopters that had operating restrictions imposed by British politicians and financial bureaucrats,<sup>21</sup> the Helmand Task Force was almost a static organization, vulnerable to IED attacks and to being pinned down in forward operating bases and platoon houses. Anti-coalition forces progressively tested the British throughout May and June.

TF Orion and TF Warrior were once again engaged in sweeping the empty northern sanctuaries. Though this may have had some benefit, in that the sweeps distracted Taliban forces from conducting effective operations against the deploying Dutch, it was difficult to measure the effectiveness of these operations. Taliban forces once again re-infiltrated the Panjwayi and Zharey districts in July, while a number of British outposts came under attack in Helmand. Consequently, CTF Aegis developed a plan to clean out Zharey and Panjwayi, and then relieve pressure on British forces in Helmand.

In Canada's most significant battle-group action since the 1993 Medak Pocket operation in Croatia and possibly since Korea, TF Orion redeployed from the north and mounted a surprise night attack on Pashmul, the defended center of Zharey district. Supported with US airpower, TF Orion engaged a well-equipped Taliban force that included jihadis from foreign countries. This enemy force had a sophisticated defense system, was well-equipped, and was prepared to engage coalition forces, not just melt away in guerrilla fashion when confronted with superior firepower. It succumbed to the TF Orion onslaught.<sup>22</sup>

The next phase of the Aegis plan was to move to assist British forces. TF Warrior was positioned to enter Helmand province from the north, while TF Orion would perform a blocking action to the south and east. British forces would then air assault into and sweep an area which contained significant leadership targets, with the aim of disrupting

enemy command and control province-wide. For a variety of reasons, this operation was less than successful and the enemy forces slipped away.

While the three CTF Aegis battlegroups were engaged in this operation, the Taliban seized two districts in southern Helmand and burned the district centers. This action precipitated a political crisis in Kabul and the Karzai government demanded an immediate response from the coalition because of the repercussions of having the media describe the enemy as “controlling” southern Helmand. At this point, the lack of British mobility, coupled with the fact that TF Warrior had been in the field continuously for over a month and was suffering a high VOR rate, meant that TF Orion, highly mobile and equipped with LAV-III, was the only force that could respond to retake the southern Helmand districts. TF Orion, augmented with an American Hummer-equipped infantry company from TF Warrior and supported by US and British airpower, re-took the two district centers and re-established Afghan government control.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the summer, Zabol province experienced less enemy activity than the other areas of RC South. Why? Some think that the combination of size (Zabol is smaller than the other provinces) and the continuity of the effort there brought about by American longevity, is the key. Afghan forces have been successfully integrated into the effort. The other possibility is that the enemy chose to focus on the newcomers in Helmand and try them on. But what about Oruzgan? Why did the Dutch not run into the same problems as the British? Before the Dutch deployment, Australian and American special operations forces, working with Afghan units, were used to secure the main routes in and out of the provincial capital first, before the Dutch laydown took place. Again, size matters in that Oruzgan is smaller than Helmand and does not border Pakistan, which reduces the effectiveness of enemy operations since infiltration must pass through Zabol and Kandahar.

## EFFECTS

Let us examine the summer actions in light of the original counter-insurgency plan and the larger ramifications for Canadian–American co-operation in the war against the Al Qaeda movement and their affiliates. The PRTs, by necessity, were pretty much left to fend for themselves throughout this period because their “twinned” maneuver battalions were deployed outside of their assigned provinces. It is difficult to measure PRT effectiveness at the best of times, but the need for protective assets to get PRT personnel into the field was attenuated. At this point, the Canadian PRT was receiving new leadership and was still processing a significant increase in funding, but the capacity to absorb and distribute the funding took some time. Capacity-building efforts with the provincial government had been on hiatus since the January 2006 assassination and corrective action was still being sorted out in the summer.

The plan to twin and mentor an ANA battalion with each CTF Aegis battlegroup worked in Zabol, but did not bear as much fruit in Kandahar or Helmand. The reasons for this require more study, but it is important to note that at the Battle of Pashmul, each Canadian infantry company had an Afghan National Army platoon working with it, with American ETT’s advising. It seems that the ANA is not yet at the point of

operating independently without coalition logistical and air support. Such dependency is dangerous in the long term if we ever want to leave Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup>

In essence, CTF Aegis was forced to abandon CJTF-76's operational plan and react to what the enemy was doing elsewhere. CTF Aegis had to adapt its own operational constructs to meet unanticipated threats and political pressures. The formation HQ was successful on both accounts. The ability of the TF Orion and TF Warrior commanders to effectively lead their troops and think creatively under arduous operational conditions was the critical factor in the success of the summer operations, because those constructs had to be turned into action on the ground.

It is also important to note that TF Orion and its support battalion were subjected to near-constant suicide IED attack throughout its operations. The only main service route for operations in Zharey and Helmand provinces passes through Kandahar City. Though special operations forces and Afghan security forces were able to disrupt some cells, the importation of trained foreign jihadis from Pakistan to replenish their ranks could not be staunched. Canadian combat support personnel had never before been confronted with such a campaign, yet they adapted and met this particular challenge, as their American counterparts have in Iraq. The enemy was able to briefly interfere but never fully disrupt support to operations in the field.

There are two areas that demand explanation when placing CTF Aegis operations in the context of counter-insurgency. In addition to the "military" fronts, this campaign was waged on two psychological fronts: the Afghan people in southern Afghanistan, and the Canadian population, politicians, and media.

International media outlets have been quick to brand operations in Afghanistan as a failure. They cite the combination of a lack of "reconstruction" progress, corruption, and huge poppy growth as evidence. There are constant criticisms that there is too much coalition military activity and not enough aid and "reconstruction". In this view, large coalition military operations, like those conducted in the summer of 2006, are indicators of failure, not success. Indeed, some commentators argue that, in a Maoist fashion, the enemy has progressed from terrorism to guerrilla operations to conventional operations, therefore they are succeeding.<sup>25</sup>

This is simplistic. The enemy used a variety of techniques, indeed all three, at the same time. The real measurement should be in looking at what effects these are having on gaining the allegiance of the population. How well, for example, is enemy religious/political mobilization succeeding in the rural areas? Has it permeated into the urban areas? When the enemy conducts operations as they have this summer, does it distract the coalition from identifying and countering religious/political mobilization? We do not know, but the enemy's inability to actually hold ground for protracted periods, declare liberated zones, and then govern and tax them in a widespread and systematic fashion is a measure of coalition success, not failure. Even if the enemy is able to accomplish this in a limited fashion, they still have to contend with the rest of Afghanistan, not just the south.

Indeed, ignoring military action and focusing solely on aid and construction would be disastrous and negligent. At the same time, our existing aid and construction efforts do not address enemy mobilization in its primary transmission media, the mosques. Western powers recognize a separation of church and state: our enemy does not and

exploits this ignorance.<sup>26</sup> In addition, some programs, like gender equality, are counter-productive in rural areas. Coupled with aggressive poppy eradication programs, ISAF may be undermining its own efforts in critical parts of RC South to gain the allegiance of the population.

The proper tools to address these challenges are not supposed to be provided by CTF Aegis and its Task Forces: they are supposed to be provided by the international community working with the Afghan government in Kabul. Where are the professional, trained police that are needed to hold cleared areas and assert law and order? Where is the judicial system that needs to accompany the police? Where is the Afghan National Army in battalion and brigade strength five years after the Taliban regime was removed? Where is the internal security and educational apparatus needed to address religious/political mobilization? CTF Aegis is only a shield to allow these things to be put in place: its soldiers and PRT personnel cannot address these deficiencies.

And then there is the critical matter of maintaining support for the Afghanistan mission in Canada, something Americans should understand and pay attention to. After the CTF Aegis commitment was made there were federal elections which removed the Liberal government. The new Conservative government, a minority government, has continued with existing policy for Afghanistan and even enhanced it. Consequently the Liberals, now in opposition, have used every perceived setback, particularly casualties, to call into question continuing with the commitment. The socialist New Democratic Party, which holds swing votes in the minority government, has demanded an immediate withdrawal and even wants to enter into negotiations with the Taliban.<sup>27</sup>

The Canadian population and its media were not prepared for casualties, particularly suicide IED casualties. Inoculated with decades of UN peacekeeping mythology and deceived by previous governments who sought to down-play Canadian combat operations in the Gulf and Kosovo, some see the current Canadian operations as something divergent from “tradition”.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, there is still a mistaken belief that ISAF is a benign, non-lethal “peacekeeping” mission, despite all protestations and evidence to the contrary. This misunderstanding also flies in the face of the facts, like the number of Canadians killed during supposed “peacekeeping” operations in the Balkans in the 1990s and during ISAF operations in Kabul back in 2003–4.

By the fall of 2006, Canada has had 36 personnel killed in Afghanistan. The United States has lost 339 between 2001 and 2006. Canada has ten per cent of the American population, so the proportion of Canadian casualties to American casualties is about the same and is therefore significant in Canada. Most of these Canadian casualties were taken during the course of CTF Aegis’s operations in 2006. Though downplayed by internal Canadian analysis, it is clear the enemy sees Canada as a weak link, as Al Qaeda did with Spain and Iraq, and is trying to undermine support for the war in Canada with suicide IED attacks and the constant attempts to attrit CTF Aegis in the Zharey and Panjwayi districts. Indeed, one successful and bloody suicide attack was conducted against Canadian troops on the eve of the opening of Parliament on 18 September 2006.<sup>29</sup>

It is important that Americans understand that every single Canadian combat death

becomes politically sensitive in ways that it does not in the United States. The combination of the novelty of being at war, the small size of the Canadian Forces, and an intense media scrutiny brought to bear on the situation are all factors. When American aircraft miss and kill Canadians, as they have in Afghanistan on a number of occasions, each incident becomes a major political event (in Canada, not the United States) that can destabilize Canada–US relations, regardless of who was to blame: not because of the deaths, particularly, but because of the perceived lack of sensitivity or even outright dismissal by Americans that the event is significant to Canadians – which is, in turn, understandable because of the comparatively large numbers of American casualties in Iraq and elsewhere.

The lack of Canadian visibility in the American media and lack of recognition of Canada’s efforts in statements by senior American military and political leaders on the war in Afghanistan, coupled with the overbearing behavior of some senior American commanders in Afghanistan, and American over-reaction to criticism from their “lessers”<sup>30</sup> becomes magnified in Canada. This state of affairs has the potential to undermine support for the mission in Afghanistan as much as enemy suicide IEDs. The only people who profit from this state of affairs is the enemy.

The southern campaign will continue in various forms but under ISAF command. The reality is that American, British, Canadian, and Dutch forces will continue to serve together in the pursuit of a stable Afghanistan. The Canadian contribution to this effort in the spring and summer of 2006 was critical to the continued success of the mission in the face of significant opposition. Canada’s soldiers do not deserve to be taken for granted, particularly after the summer of 2006.

## NOTES

1. “Afghanistan: Are the Taliban Winning?”, *Newsweek*, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14975282/site/newsweek/>; Arnaud de Borchgrave, “Of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Wars Unwinnable”, *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, 19 September 2006.
2. “UK General Warns of Afghan Threat”, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/4779321.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4779321.stm).
3. Jim Lobe, “US Losing the Peace in Afghanistan”, *Asia Times*, 21 June 2003.
4. The author was present with CTF Aegis and TF Orion for the summer of 2006 and closely observed planning and operations conducted over this time frame.
5. Richard Gimblett, *Operation APOLLO: The Golden Age of the Navy in the War Against Terrorism*, Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2004.
6. Sean M. Maloney, “ISAF: Origins of a Stabilization Force”, *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 3–11.
7. ISAF HQ briefing to the author, Kabul, December 2004.
8. Task Force Athena briefing to the author, Kabul, December 2004.
9. Provincial Reconstruction Team briefing to the author, Kandahar, December 2005.
10. Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan briefings to the author, December 2005 and July 2006.
11. Task Force Afghanistan briefing to the author, Kandahar, December 2005.
12. Task Force Aegis briefing to the author, Kandahar, June 2006.
13. Hans de Vriej, “Dutch Under Pressure Over Doubts About Afghan Mission”, <http://www.radionetherlands.nl/currentaffairs/region/netherlands/ned060113>; Judy Dempsey, “Dutch Pressed Over Afghanistan”, *International Herald Tribune*, 30 January 2006.

14. Task Force Afghanistan briefing to the author, Kandahar, December 2005; Provincial Reconstruction Team briefing to the author, Kandahar, December 2005.
15. Provincial Reconstruction Team briefing to the author, Kandahar, December 2005.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Provincial Reconstruction Team briefing to the author, Kandahar, July 2006.
18. Combined Task Force Aegis briefing to the author, Kandahar, June 2006.
19. The author observed CTF Aegis and TF Orion's planning and operations throughout the summer of 2006. This discussion is based on those observations and in-camera discussions with the CTF HQ personnel.
20. The author participated in these operations.
21. Sean Rayment, "Helicopter Shortage Puts Our Troops at Risk", *Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 2006.
22. The author participated in this action at the company level, after having observed the battle-group-level planning cycle leading up to it.
23. The author observed the brigade planning cycle and execution of these operations.
24. National Training Center briefing to the author, Kabul, July 2006.
25. The author has continuously encountered this perception in dealing with media outlets and Canadian parliamentarians on the Standing Committee on Defence. It clearly reflects a 1960s generational understanding of insurgency that the Baby Boom generation would be familiar with from the Vietnam era, but has been imposed as a template on today's operations.
26. I am indebted to Padre Captain Sulyman Demiray, the Canadian Forces' mullah, for bringing this vital aspect to my attention.
27. "Layton Suggests Talks with the Taliban", *Globe and Mail*, 1 September 2006.
28. To understand this debate, see Sean M. Maloney, "From Myth to Reality Check", *Policy Options*, September 2005, <http://www.irpp.org/po>.
29. "Suicide Bomber Kills Four Canadian Soldiers", 18 September 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/09/18/bombing-canadians.html>.
30. The author observed and experienced this behavior in Afghanistan.