

Canada In Afghanistan

One of the Liberal proposals about what the nature of Canada's mission in Afghanistan should look like seems to me to be pretty wise. It keeps Canada in Afghanistan but removes us from taking the leadership in combat missions.

We have proved during our tenure that we can do this. There is nothing more to prove. We have cleared and re-cleared "Taliban" strongholds in an effort to help the rebuilding of this struggling "new" state. There is no foreseeable end in sight as this threatens to become a contemporary Ypres.

Changing our mission from a combat mission to that of development and diplomacy, all the while retaining the ability and the readiness to move from a passive defence role to a proactive defence role in the context of a larger NATO or UN mission is sensible thinking. It is time to declare the state secure and move to provide adequate policing to ensure its safety and stability.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper needs to read the entire Committee report on Afghanistan and recognize that part of the failure is the leadership from the PMO and the communications blockade to Canadians. He has not done that. He refocused the report by addressing a few small but key elements (helicopters and troops) and treats them as if they are the whole. Actually, they are irrelevant without the first elements, leadership and communication.

Add to this the war-mongering of Rick Hillier and we are quickly falling into a reverse Iraq situation that contains the same outcome. In Iraq, President Bush declared the war over too soon and then lost the peace. In Kandahar the threat is the reverse, by prolonging the war we risk the peace. The war is over, except in some metaphorical or extended sense, and so should be declared over.

War is about destruction. It is about conquering territory and capturing and controlling assets. War is contrary to peace. War is not waged to secure peace. War is ended to create peace.

Peace is not destroyed by terrorism or insurgents, it is destroyed by armies who would fight and continue to fight when other measures may prove to be more effective. Peace is threatened when killing is seen as the only remedy and utilized as the remedy in place of the harder work of diplomacy, discussion and discretion.

Peace is the work of governments, not armies. Army commanders have a role in preparing the ground for peace but cannot secure or keep peace. Rick Hillier can command our troops in war, but he must follow our government in peace. It's time for the Prime Minister to spell out what is expected and for the good general to redirect his energy to bringing that about.

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