

Canada In Kandahar

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"We are not the public service of Canada. We are not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."

-- General Rick Hillier

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were the catalyst for a long series of events that would change the lives of people worldwide for years to follow. Canada now finds itself mired in one of the most dangerous regions of Afghanistan, desperately trying to complete its biggest military operation since the Korean War. Canada began its mission in Afghanistan in Kandahar Province after the US had secured the region. Canadian troops were then sent to the relative safety of the country's capital, Kabul, and Canada was set to reduce its role in Afghanistan after one year. However, the decision was made to send troops back to Kandahar in an extensive role that would draw Canada deeper into conflict and long-term commitments.

This essay will argue that there were three primary motivations behind Canada's decision to remain in Afghanistan and move from Kabul back to Kandahar in an extensive combat-developmental role: a desire to please the United States, a desire for international prestige and bargaining power, and a desire to display and properly support Canada's revolutionized military and defence policy. Of the many external and domestic actors that influenced the final decision, special attention will be paid to Rick Hillier, the Canadian general described as the "driving intellectual force" (Simpson, 2009, p. 1) and the "principal architect... [of] Canada's current mission to Afghanistan" (Stein and Lang, 2008, p.1).

Canada's involvement in Afghanistan can only be considered in connection with Canada's closest ally, the US. After the 9/11 attacks, Canada was politically obligated to support the US in its attempt to capture those responsible and deter future attacks. NATO invoked Article 5 of the *Treaty of Washington*, which states that an attack on one member of NATO is considered an attack on all, and that all members are expected to assist the attacked member in collective self-defence. In response to the US request for military assistance, Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced that Canada would provide "certain contributions as part of an international military coalition against international terrorism" ("Chretien: Canadian Troops," 2001, p.1). This coalition was to invade Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban in order to capture Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda terrorists behind the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban were militant Islamists then ruling Afghanistan, and they were sheltering bin Laden from international prosecution (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.33).

Canada's initial contribution was limited. Four naval ships sailed to the Arabian Sea and Canada's special forces unit—Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2)—was secretly sent to southern Afghanistan with other coalition special forces in early December ("Canadian Commandoes," 2001, p.1). Eventually, 750 soldiers deployed to Kandahar Province, beginning in January 2002, for six months. Their tour was relatively uneventful, as the US had already cleared out most of the Taliban. When the tour ended it seemed that Canada's military would be given a "period of operational pause and regeneration" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.20).

However, it was expected that the US would soon request a renewed Canadian troop presence in Afghanistan in order to free up American troops for the pending invasion of Iraq. Canadian military leaders were supportive of another combat mission in Kandahar; former Minister of National Defence John McCallum says, "[The military leadership]... liked the idea of us being in combat... They generally looked closely to their American peers. Those were the people they wanted to impress" (quoted in Stein and Lang, 2007, p.42).

In January 2003, McCallum met with US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld. McCallum had been advised by the Canadian ambassador to Washington to reaffirm that "Canada was a secure and reliable ally" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.47). Rumsfeld requested that Canada lead the International Security Assistance Force, the UN-mandated coalition operating in Afghanistan (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.50). McCallum responded by saying that if this option were accepted, Canada would not be able to offer any troops to Iraq, as political will and military resources would be directed towards Afghanistan instead.

In what became known as the "Afghanistan Solution" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.73), Canada accepted leadership of ISAF. Canada would not support the US in Iraq, but contributing more troops to Afghanistan was said to be "a neat political way of squaring the problem... of Canada-US relations" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.63). The main reason for further Canadian involvement in Afghanistan, then, was a desire to please the US.

In August 2003, two thousand Canadian troops began deployment to Kabul. Canada was to lead ISAF for one year, after which another NATO country would assume responsibility. This was the exit-strategy for Canada and the precondition of accepting leadership set by then Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Ray Henault. Canada's mission was to "help... the Afghan Transitional Authority maintain a safe and secure environment in Kabul" while a constitution was developed and ratified ("Operation Athena," 2011, p.1). It was not expected to be a very dangerous mission, and Canada would win favour with the US, while still ensuring its exit from the war.

A more important part of Canada's exit strategy was a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). PRTs were the "core of the post-war nation-building strategy the [US] had developed for Afghanistan" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.98). They consisted of civilian and military personnel working to "encourage peace and

stability within regions and monitor the supervision of developmental activities," and to strengthen the influence of the Afghan government (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.97). They would operate according to the "3-D approach," integrating defence, diplomacy and developmental assistance. After establishing security and assisting in the rebuilding process, PRTs would allow the US to gradually withdraw from Afghanistan by handing the responsibility of long-term reconstruction work over to its allies. Similarly, Canadian officials were already planning to replace the 2000 Canadian troops with a 200-person-strong PRT at the end of their tour as part of Canada's exit strategy, replacing the large combative mission with a smaller, safer reconstructive mission (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.108).

Ironically, the PRT would draw Canada deeper into the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan. The origins of this may be found in the replacement of Jean Chretien by Paul Martin as Prime Minister in 2003. Martin was concerned about how Chretien had left the state of Canada's relationship with the US after years of uneasy "business-like relations" (Barry, 2003, p. 120), culminating in Chretien's refusal to support the Iraq War. Improving Canada-US relations was a priority for Martin, and this would prove to be a significant factor in Canada's increased role in Afghanistan.

Martin also wanted to distinguish his government from Chretien's, which was characterized by "managerialism and incrementalism" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.109). Martin planned to present a "bold, ambitious agenda" that would "redefine and transform Canada's role in the world" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.139). The last major review of Canada's foreign policy had been done by Chretien's government ten years earlier. Bill Graham—Martin's new Minister of Foreign Affairs—was charged with coordinating all the government departments to produce a dramatic review of Canada's foreign policy.

However, it was soon found that no one was capable of writing such a review. The drafts produced lacked the transformational vision that Martin was looking for (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.141). Bill Graham decided to find a new Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who could inspire a revolutionary defence policy that would act as the basis for Martin's desired foreign policy (Stein and Lang, 2007, 143). Rick Hillier was such a man.

Known as a "soldier's soldier" (Candour and Combat), Hillier was highly respected within both the Canadian and American militaries. He had extensive experience commanding multi-national operations (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.101), and had been given command of ISAF in 2004. Hillier was asked by Graham to present his vision for the "future of the Canadian Forces and Canada's role in international peace and security" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.143). Hillier impressed Graham with "a detailed analysis of the international security environment... claim[ing] that the biggest threat to global peace and security... would be failed and failing states" such as Afghanistan (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.146-147).

One of the central ideas of previous Canadian missions in other theatres was the "3-Block War." Three-block warfare consisted of "deliver[ing] humanitarian aid... conduct[ing] stabilization or peace support

operations.... [and] engag[ing] in... high-intensity fight[s]... simultaneously and very close to one another... in large urban centres and complex terrain" (Bratt, 2007, p.244). Hillier argued that in order to effectively assist international efforts in failing states like Afghanistan, three-block warfare had to be used, and that required "major structural, organizational, and cultural change[s]... [and] a substantial increase in the size [and budget] of the military" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.155). Graham believed that Hillier could inspire a novel defence policy paper that would in turn inform the IPS with the bold vision Martin was looking for.

Martin was also impressed with Hillier and decided to make him the Chief of Defence Staff. Within weeks Hillier produced a defence policy paper that won Martin's approval and the promise of billions of dollars in funding for the Canadian Forces (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.157). Hillier was set to revolutionize Canada's military and "restore [it] to its former glory" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.159), bringing Canada's military out of the "decade of darkness" brought on by Liberal budget cuts in the early 1990s ("Top General," 2007, p.1). This enthusiastic support for the military would prove instrumental in giving Canadian troops an extensive combat-developmental role in Kandahar.

In February 2005, NATO expanded ISAF's mission ("NATO to expand mission," 2005, p.1). Until then, ISAF's mandate had been limited to operating in and around Kabul. Because of this the Afghan government had little control outside the capital, leaving the rest of the country in poor condition. The Taliban—the hardline Islamist militant group which had previously ruled Afghanistan but which had been overthrown by the US invasion in 2001—had begun a resurgence along with powerful drug lords. It was recognized that if Afghanistan was to ever function normally with order restored and maintained, then ISAF's expanded mission would deploy PRTs from NATO countries throughout Afghanistan in an attempt to "wrestle... control of the south... from insurgents and criminals" (Windsor, Charters, Wilson, 2008, p.33).

When Bill Graham announced Canada would deploy a PRT after operations in Kabul were over, the PRT was still thought of as an exit strategy. However, it was not yet known to which Afghan province the PRT would be sent, even though officials had known since 2003 that the PRT would be part of Canada's exit plan (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.133). The US, Germany and Britain had already deployed PRTs in 2003, and at this time other NATO countries were scouting out "the best real estate, the safer neighbourhoods of Afghanistan" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.133) for their PRTs.

Officials in Foreign Affairs and Defence spent almost a year debating where to send Canada's PRT. Some preferred Kabul, where the Canadians were already established; others preferred the relatively stable north, and others wanted a western deployment so as to better observe Iran (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.133). Italy wanted to work with Canada in Herat, in the north-west, and the commander of NATO wanted Canada in Chaghcharan, in Afghanistan's centre (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.135). At this time Ray Henault was still CDS, and he rejected the idea of a Canadian PRT in either Herat or Chaghcharan. Both provinces would be within "the Italian sphere of influence," and the idea of working with or under the

Italians was not popular within the Canadian military, since Canada's role might be overshadowed by them (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.136). In addition, Chaghcharan offered Canada "inadequate international visibility" because it was so isolated (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.136). There were also logistical challenges.

NATO was not interested in Canada sending a PRT to Kandahar. Brian Stewart says that all of NATO knew Canada's military was "quite incapable of handling all the security nightmares of Kandahar" ("Canada in Kandahar," 2011, p.1). However, Henault and other Canadian officials believed Canada was up to the task. Many believed that Kandahar would become a pivotal province, so a deployment there would put Canada in the international spotlight. The ambassador to Kabul at the time believed that putting a PRT in Kandahar would fit with the "robust capabilities of the Canadian Forces... and the evolving mission of ISAF" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.133). Britain and Holland would have well-equipped and well-trained troops operating in neighbouring provinces, and the Canadian military had experience working with these troops (Windsor *et al.*, 2008, p.36).

From the beginning, then, Kandahar was considered a feasible option for Canada's PRT, at least from the perspective of Canadian officials. The main reason for this seems to be a desire for international respect and recognition of Canada's contribution to Afghanistan. Canada's international influence and respect had "risen substantially" since the Kabul tour (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.132), and a Kandahar mission would continue this growth of international respect and political sway. The ever-present urge to impress the US may have also played a role, as evidenced by Henault and Graham contacting US officials to ask where the US wanted Canada's PRT (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.137).

While there were political and logistical reasons for returning to Kandahar, many people believe that Rick Hillier was a deciding factor. Hillier was a figurehead who could be used by detractors or supporters of the military, since his support for the military was so outspoken and unequivocal. Stein and Lang write that "Hillier wanted a deployment that would get Canada deeper and deeper into the most troubled part of Afghanistan" (2007, p.181). However, Hillier claims that he had argued for a deployment to Kabul. "Nobody in Ottawa was interested," he writes, "so the idea died" (Hillier, 2009, p.343). By the time he became CDS, he continues, "[t]he government had already signalled its intent to go into Kandahar... and the [various departments] were well into their planning of that mission" (Hillier, 2009, p.343). According to Windsor *et al.*, the Deputy Director of Policy on the Afghanistan Task Force and the Political Director for the Kandahar Reconstruction Team also reject the idea that Hillier "drove the Kandahar commitment" (Windsor *et al.*, 2008, p.35). Hillier does say, however, that he supported the choice of Kandahar over Herat, calling the latter a "backwater" that would have given Canada "little visibility, credibility or impact internationally" (Hillier, 2009, p.343), showing he was also motivated by a desire for international respect for Canada.

Hillier does not go into details about the Kandahar decision in his memoir, but he does not seem to be the type of person who lets ideas he firmly believes in fade away in the bureaucracy and political offices of Ottawa. What he was thinking is not certain. It may be that he dutifully suggested a Kabul mission,

one that would be safe for Canadian troops and would fit with the public's expectation of the military, but when he found that the political environment was leaning towards Kandahar he enthusiastically supported that mission instead.

While Stein and Lang may have erred in attributing the choice of Kandahar to Hillier, they seem to be correct in claiming that he was responsible for greatly expanding the role of the PRT. After being CDS for only a month, Hillier had already devised a plan that "went far beyond deploying a single PRT [in Kandahar] as an exit strategy from Kabul" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.181). He understood better than the politicians that a PRT alone would have little impact in Kandahar (Hillier, 2009, p.343). His plan consisted of five elements (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.182). The first was the deployment of a PRT to Kandahar in the late summer of 2005, for two to three years. He then argued for the deployment of JTF2 special forces to the same region. Next, he proposed that Canada send a battle group of up to 1000 soldiers to work first with US troops under Operation Enduring Freedom, and then under NATO's mandate when the US scaled back its presence. Fourth, Hillier wanted Canada to send 350 soldiers and a one-star general to take command of the ISAF Regional Command South headquarters in Kandahar. Finally, Hillier wanted a fifteen-person team sent to Kabul to assist the Afghan government and gain valuable information and influence.

When Hillier presented this plan to Martin in March 2005, Afghanistan was not one of the prime minister's priorities (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.189). Martin was interested in exploring a traditional "Canadian" peacekeeping role in Darfur, something which would easily gain public support. Assisting international efforts in Haiti was next on his list, followed by peacekeeping opportunities in the Middle East. While Martin would have had the PRT play a minimalistic role in Afghanistan, Hillier presented powerful arguments in favour of giving the PRT a much broader mandate and extensive capabilities.

First, such an involved role would gain Canada much-needed favour in US eyes. Although Canada-US relations were a priority of the Martin government, the relationship between the two countries had become somewhat strained due to repeated Canadian refusals of American requests. There was still lingering tension in the Pentagon from Chretien's decision to refuse to support the Iraq war, and Martin had refused to send Canadian troops to Iraq to participate in a NATO mission to train the Iraqi army (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.167). Canada had also declined to join the Ballistic Missile Defence program. As the US was scaling back operations in Afghanistan in order to focus more on Iraq, it needed allied troops to help sustain its mission in Afghanistan. Canadian officials believed that another major contribution to Afghanistan would make up for lapses in US-Canada relations and win US approval and gratitude.

Hillier argued that such a major contribution would win Canada the respect of "[n]ot only the [US], but also the United Kingdom, NATO, the UN, and the Afghan government" (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.184). Canada's foreign and defence policy would be boldly transformed, thus distinguishing Martin from his predecessor and making a Canadian mark on the world. Thanks to the raised profile of its military, "Canada would no longer be on the margins" of international politics (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.184-185).

Indeed, the Canada Research Chair in International Security and Ethnic Conflict later wrote, "Canada has gained a great deal of influence because of its willingness to lead... in Kandahar. While it does not see itself as a power-seeking country, having more influence, whether it is over operations in Afghanistan or in bilateral discussions with the United States, is a significant and undervalued benefit" (Saidemen, 2009, p.1).

It is clear that Hillier's enthusiastic support of the Canadian Forces motivated him to propose such a major contribution to Afghanistan. First, as a responsible general he would not let a PRT deploy to Kandahar without adequate protection. But the plan he proposed went beyond simply protecting the PRT. It involved a far more committed, multi-dimensional force that would fight a three-block war. This is what was needed to have any significant impact, and it neatly coincided with Hillier's defence policy. An extensive Kandahar mission provided Hillier the opportunity to put his defence policy into action, changing the PRT from a mission designed as an exit strategy that would likely have little impact, to one aimed at making lasting contributions to Afghanistan. Doing so would bring the Canadian Forces out of the "decade of darkness" caused by Liberal defence cuts by raising the profile, budget and moral of the Canadian Forces ("Top General," 2007, p.1). Hillier also believed the military would earn public support and pride for taking on such a difficult but important mission (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.185).

Martin did not share Hillier's view that the public would support an extensive combative role (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.191). He believed Canadians would offer more support for peacekeeping roles in places like Darfur and Haiti. He also thought that actively pursuing such operations would better distinguish him from the preceding government than would missions in Afghanistan that were holdovers from Chretien's era (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.192). However, Hillier was still able to convince Martin to support his Kandahar package. After being assured that, among other things, the mission would not constrain the military's capacity to provide troops for both Darfur and Haiti, Martin agreed to look into Hillier's proposal (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.191).

In May 2005, Hillier's Kandahar package was accepted by the Cabinet, launching Canada into a mission that was far more complicated and dangerous than anyone had contemplated. Hillier's contribution to the mission likely better prepared Canadian troops for what they would encounter. It was first billed as anything but a war: it was a mission aimed at rebuilding Afghanistan, "a clear expression of Canadian values at work," according to Martin's chief of staff Tim Murphy (Stein and Lang, 2007, p.199). However, it soon became clear that the traditional role of Canada's military was being radically changed from one of peacekeeping boy-scouts to all-out warriors (Bratt, 2007, p.247).

The job of warriors, and the Canadian Forces, is to be able to kill people—at least, according to Rick Hillier. Now, over ten years after the initial invasion, the role of Canada's military in Afghanistan has shrunk substantially, and Hillier's bold statement does not seem to ring as true as he may wish. Those Canadian soldiers remaining in Afghanistan are either training Afghan soldiers and police, or providing protection for those in charge of training. While Canada's military may not have been revolutionized to

the extent Hillier wanted, its soldiers have certainly gained renewed support from the government and public, and the experience in Afghanistan—from Kandahar to Kabul, and back to Kandahar—has brought forth many lessons for both policy makers and military leaders.

The public has often questioned Canada's Afghanistan mission, and there are many factors which explain its development. Canada was first drawn into Kabul by its political obligation to support the US. The PRT was originally intended as part of Canada's exit plan, with Kandahar as the preferred choice for its placement because of the international prestige it would bring. Finally, Hillier believed the Canadian Forces could and should play a significant role in international affairs, and that if the Forces were to have any impact in Afghanistan, the PRT should be given a more extensive role, rather than be seen as an exit plan. Hillier saw Kandahar as the perfect place to display Canada's revitalized military and new, more aggressive defence policy. His support of the military and belief in its importance were instrumental in committing the PRT to a more extensive, combative role that would eventually lead to Canada's long-term engagement in Afghanistan.

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