Article 1:

**Taliban will target Canadians if they sense political weakness.(Column)(THE AFGHAN MISSION: NOT A PRIMITIVE ENEMY)**

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The last time I was in Kandahar, last fall, I had a few calls from one of The Globe and Mail's fixers, the man whose particular job it is to make contacts with local elders and the Taliban and to report back to the journalist in the field.

These conversations were all pretty much of a piece.

I was then out in the middle of nowhere with the Canadian soldiers then just newly in theatre -- the Van Doos, or Royal 22nd Regiment, from Valcartier, Que. The fixer was somewhere else. The cell service was sketchy, the fixer's English rudimentary but infinitely better than my Pashto.

I should say that unlike other Globe correspondents, who sometimes bravely cover the war in Afghanistan as unembedded reporters, or free agents, I spend most of my time embedded with Canadian troops, am able to write what I see or hear with my own ears and eyes, and don't have to rely on our fixers for very much except the occasional ride into the city.

Anyway, as I recall, this fellow initiated every call, and would begin always by doing what I took to be establishing his bona fides: He would mention a cousin or friend of his who was either in village A or who had a cousin or friend in village A, and who was thus allegedly in a position to know what was happening there.

Then he would give me the news, such as it was.

But one day, he volunteered that his Taliban contacts were talking about this new group of Canadian soldiers, that they were French-speaking, and that they'd noted their purported unwillingness to go out of their forward operating bases or to fight. He actually chuckled, making me wish I could smack him, as he delivered this last bit.

I was stunned, to be honest - not because I believed what he said was true or had seen any evidence of it, not because I relied on his information or used it, but because he or his informants were sophisticated enough not only to be aware of the recent shift in Canadian troops but also of nuances in the realpolitik of our country.

I thought of this when I read and saw coverage this weekend of a speech given last Friday by the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier.

I wasn't there when he spoke and haven't been able to find a complete transcript of his remarks, but from all I've found there was nothing remotely controversial in what he had to say.

Contrary to some reports, Gen. Hillier didn't push MPs to extend the mission so much as he strongly urged them to give soldiers "clarity of purpose" (in other words, give them clear marching orders and do it as quickly as possible) and to suggest that if MPs are, as it now appears, going to extend the mission (past the now-artificial deadline of 2009 to a new artificial deadline of 2011), to do so with one firm voice.

Part of Gen. Hillier's rationale, perfectly within his mandate as the head of the Canadian Forces and his duty to speak for his soldiers, was that young troops deserve to know what it is their Parliament is asking of them.

The other part was that with the fate of the mission uncertain, "we are, in the eyes of the Taliban, in a window of extreme vulnerability. And the longer we go without that clarity, with the issue in doubt, the more the Taliban will target us as a perceived weak link," he said.

Well, if the Ottawa press corps didn't directly pronounce the very idea preposterous, (though I thought some of the all-knowing smiles and body language of the TV reporters hinted at that), it was implicit in story lines suggesting the speech had "raised eyebrows" or that the general had somehow "crossed a line."

Certainly, NDP defence critic Dawn Black's reaction, that it was "beyond belief" for the CDS to even suggest that recent suicide bombings could be linked to the Canadian debate, was widely repeated. That is hardly a shocker: Ms. Black has been to Kandahar all of once, on one of those VIP-type quickie visits that are largely confined to the big base at Kandahar Air Field and environs, and the lead item on her website is a "Peace Advocacy" page. Those eyebrows are easily raised.

Truth is, it is quite believable that the Taliban would target Canadians if they sense that it is a useful time to inflict casualties.

Afghanistan may be a country reduced to rubble by decades of war and invasion, its infrastructure in tatters, its people mostly illiterate, but that doesn't translate to a primitive enemy, as my instructive chat with the fixer reminded me. A senior Canadian commander once described Afghanistan as "Babylon with cellphones," and it remains the best description I've heard, precisely because it incorporates both the roughness of the place and the clever, self-sufficient adaptability of the people.

If only because Afghans have been fighting for so long on their own turf - in recent history against the invading former Soviet Union, against one another - they are singularly good at it. It is no happy accident that virtually everything in that bloody country, whatever else its function, is also purpose-built for fighting.

Where a decade ago the word Taliban meant the group of religious zealots who controlled the country for a few exceptionally brutal years, the word now is shorthand for a veritable soup of fighters - the young and impoverished, drawn in by money, boredom or intimidation; those affiliated with tribal bosses or drug lords who share only the Taliban's goal of instability; foreign fighters from Pakistan and elsewhere, and old-school ideologues. But the one sure thing is that they are a smart and informed fighting force, as capable of recognizing political weakness in NATO home countries as they are a military one in the field.

There was nothing in Gen. Hillier's remarks to suggest that there should not be a debate about Afghanistan. And Lord thundering Jesus, as they say in Gen. Hillier's native province, there has been nothing but debate in this country since our soldiers first went to Kandahar. With every Canadian soldier's death, there is debate; with every Senlis Council report, there is debate; with every public opinion poll, there is debate.

Nor was there anything in his remarks to suggest that Parliament's authority ought to be usurped, or undermined. Gen. Hillier said that Parliament's servants, the soldiers, await Parliament's direction. He merely asked that the direction be clear, cogent and given swiftly.

Article 2

**Jack Layton: the leader of the NDP policy ... and talking with the Taliban.(POWER & POLITICS)(Interview)**

Taylor, Scott, and Sara Caverley. "Jack Layton: the leader of the NDP policy ... and talking with the Taliban.(POWER & POLITICS)(Interview). ." Esprit de Corps.  16.5 (June 2009): 14(5). General OneFile. Gale. UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO. 14 Sept. 2009   
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On Monday, May 4, 2009, Esprit de Corps publisher Scott Taylor and reporter Sara Caverley sat down with NDP leader Jack Layton in his Ottawa office. What follows is an abridged version of that conversation, starting with the current economic crisis.

Esprit de Corps: One of the biggest places [the government] can spend money is [on military] procurement. Your party must have a list of priorities out there that you think the government should be pursuing, which would, in turn, create short-term jobs. What are your ideas on taking what the military needs and stimulating the economy?

Jack Layton: I would always want to be looking to the advice of the military leadership, but one place you could start is on the accommodation of our service personnel and their families. And you know there's a huge amount of work to be done there. You can't send those jobs offshore. We've got lumber mills all over the country that are being closed down. Imagine if we said, let's build affordable housing all over Canada, and military housing for people who have been waiting for years. That creates a spin off of work for small business that provide upholstery, appliances, you name it, that would be a high priority for us. We believe people who serve in our armed forces (and their families) have been taken for granted in many ways.

Is that something that you're pushing for internally ? Do you have any support amongst opposition parties for that issue?

We haven't heard any particular support from other quarters as yet. We need a second stimulus package. The first one didn't include any of this kind of direct investment. We think the second package should come now. All the indications are that the first one isn't going to get the job done. Then there are issues like shipbuilding. We're one of the few countries with such an enormous coastline that doesn't have a policy that says we're going to build some of the vessels that are required by our military here in Canada.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

But that's something wherein the military has always done the same batch buying of ships. [They build 12 vessels all at once] and then the yards shut down and they move on. Why don't we have a 'ship-a-year' program, where at the age of 20, we retire a ship and we [maintain a 20-ship navy. The construction would be continuous], so you maintain the ]shipyard] expertise. Everyone always says this makes sense, but no one's ever done it. All our ships now need upgrading, or are retired and replaced all at the same time. When do we move forward and try to rationalize that process?

You've got to get started tight away. It should be part of your capital program on an ongoing basis. But maybe that's because I come from the municipal world. You have to do that in the municipal world if you're going to keep your infrastructure in shape.

In the NDP policy, where would we be better placed in deploying our troops with the limited resources our military's got now, in terms of other operations or other roles we could be taking on? What would be your priorities for Canada ? If we scale down Afghanistan and stop that focus and look at somewhere else, what would be your list of places that Canada should be deployed based on the capacity that we possess now?

I think we need to re-establish our role in the international missions. We're now about 50th or worse in the international, UN-based missions. You know the blue berets--we're down to just a couple of dozen participants. In terms of reflecting the values of a lot of Canadians, there's a huge support for that kind of involvement by our armed forces, and great respect around the country for the role we played over the years in those missions. That would be making the commitment to the UN that we're going to be there. They need our leadership and experience.

We need to get back to that middle power, independent status. We've lost that. It's been eroded. We're now an adjunct to the American forces and policy. As much as they say the Canadian government hasn't sold the mission to Canadians, I think they've also avoided having to confront to most Canadians the fact that we're not blue berets anymore.

Most Canadians are in shock when I tell them the numbers.

But they also think that our mission in Afghanistan is, somehow--because we have the UN mandate, NATO headquarters, etc.--similar to a peacekeeping operation. Which it really isn't. When it comes to choices of specific missions, we should say to the global organization that we helped to create--the UN--'We're back! We're ready to be involved. You can count on us to come up with our share of the kind of people you need to help really provide leadership on some of these missions.' You've got other countries coming in that don't have the experience that we have.

We've been drawn in this situation to the point where there are some that would say we can't leave without leaving our allies high and dry. What would you see as the course of action that would do the least amount of damage to our reputation within our NATO alliances?

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

I don't think there would be damage done to the reputation to the Canadians. When you consider how long we've been there--longer than the second world war; the number of sacrifices that have been made; the fact that we were centred in Kandahar. I think what we would have the opportunity to do if we proceeded on that path as we should. Parliament has established a time-line now. We can get back to playing that role of using our peacemaking and all those other skills within our broader toolbox in Canada of people who can play a role--diplomacy, development, and all these other pieces of the puzzle.

The current government's mindset seems to be tough it out, carry on to 2011 or beyond. I'm not hearing a lot of people suggesting we've got to make this dramatic change in course.

We've got to make the dramatic change in course. I think some people might say, well what about Obama? Obama's starting to say we're going to have to start talking to people and take a different approach. It's very different from the old George Bush bravado:

We're going to go in there and get the job done and we're going to win this war! In fact, he announced the victory even before it happened.

Last time we ran a Q&A with you was in 2006, and you were being derided for suggesting Canada should be involved in a dialogue with the Taliban. Now that Harper's convinced that peace requires negotiation, what should Canada's next steps include?

Well, I don't feel lonely, that's for sure.

Do you feel vindicated?

I never like to put it that way. I guess we felt an approach had to be taken. Churchill always said it's better to jaw-jaw than to fight. We put it out there and people tried to call us names. But now, if there's "Taliban Jack," then there's "Taliban Barack" and even "Taliban Stephen." I guess we're all one big Taliban club. Not really.

Before we had our convention in September 2006, I had a press conference in August to say I was calling on our convention to support this new approach to Afghanistan: withdraw our troops, call for a comprehensive peace process, start negotiating with elements of the insurgency. Before that, there had been an article in the Toronto Star describing how some of our soldiers on the ground were already involved in some of those kinds of discussions, and nobody batted an eye! They were doing the tight thing. They understood that what you need to do is to build trust and the kind of environment that would ultimately remove the fuel from the insurgent who wanted to fire things up.

But Peter MacKay came out very quickly and said that wasn't their (the government's) policy and he overrode his troops on the ground. I think that was a big mistake. He was breaking with tradition in the Canadian military involved in difficult situations, which was using years and years of experience to try to avoid bloodshed and build support. Search and destroy missions with fighter jets aren't the best way to create that kind of environment. What you end up creating is a situation where the insurgents would come in and say, look what they did to your family. Send your youngest and best with us.

What I'm heartened by in some of Obama's language, albeit you've got to understand the kind of context he's in--he's making a big pull-out from Iraq. He's got to show that he's muscular. But he's talking about the need for a different approach. He's not talking about victory in the same over-arching, simplistic way that the Bush administration was doing and the Harper administration was doing, and call anybody who questions it names, and assume that would be a suitable response.

The Harper Conservatives went so far down that road with Bush, and espoused the same rhetoric: It was about winning the fight and closing the border. Now you've got Obama saying we need a regional solution.

We've always said that it's got to be the countries of the region that take charge of this instability. I remember talking about Pakistan with Karzai in September '06, saying we've got to get Pakistan involved in the solution. That was back in the days of the military running Pakistan. We now have a very unstable situation, but at least there's an effort to create a democratic context--all the more reason for Canada to be there very actively in the diplomatic context.

But for the Harper Conservatives it's difficult to switch direction as much as they did; for Obama it's easy--he's going to come in and fix Bush's course. People wanted a change, that's why they voted him in. Here [in Canada], we have a leader who had to do a 180. He did it quickly and he's been somewhat successful because people, given that there's an end date, have really lost their focus on Afghanistan.

I worry about that, because there are more than two years to go. There's loss of life that lays ahead, and we still have soldiers coming back with an awful lot of stress. It is a brutal situation. They're not getting the support they need. We can't just let this issue get swept off the table over the next two years because of that deadline.

It is such a large window still for them to achieve something, which would, if it comes to a successful conclusion, at least validate the sacrifice that the soldiers have made to date, if we get to the finish line and just pull out. I think that the PTSD [suffered by our soldiers] will be exacerbated by the fact that people went off and then can't come to grips with what they failed to achieve. Canada has not lost a war yet in our history.

It's not a war that's going to be won. It's a conflict that's going to be brought to an end. There's a big difference. The question is, how do you get to that ending. If you're waiting to win some sort of out-right conquering of the enemy with the white flags to come up, you're going to be at this for one heck of a long time.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

We saw the Canadian public get alarmed when we heard about the so-called rape law. That was the first time there was a wake-up call for Canadians that the Karzai government is also composed of Islamic extremists.

[Hamid Karzai] told me when I met with him in 2006 that there are Taliban in the government.

So what did people think their attitudes towards women's rights would be? Of course they're going to be very close to the Taliban. It's not like they were fighting under the democratic banner of human rights. The Soviets wanted the same thing. People who don't know their history think that if we're supporting Karzai, he must be some sort of all-around good guy [with democratic values]. And now that they find out what he's doing--repealing the votes for women, etc.--Canadians are going to question who it is we're propping up. A lot of people presumed it was about removing the burka and liberating them from all these things, which predate the Taliban by 300 years. It's got nothing to do with them. But by defeating them, we thought, okay, we're done this, and on every simplistic terms, Canadians could buy, into that because we were liberating women and sending young girls to school. Now if the Karzai government is going to remove that, we've achieved nothing.

So let's try some techniques that might work. Like, you just have to talk to the people who are working on the projects to try to empower women, for example. The way to empower women is to support these success projects that are out there. Of course, there are some security issues. It's the prosecution of the search and destroy and the constant underlying of that approach that has got to change.

How do you target and isolate member's of the Taliban who are not fighting for ideological reason, but rather for food and money to support their financials? Are these the Taliban members of Karzai's government?

I'm not going to claim to be the expert on precisely how this should be conducted in terms of who talks to who. I am saying as a country, we should become the champion of a new direction in Afghanistan, that being the creation of a comprehensive approach to the peace process, and using all the instruments of the UN.

The UN has many different components that can be helpful here. From aid to human development, to democratic institutional support, to the creation of negotiating opportunities it's not just the military that can havc a role here. I'm just saying Canada should step to the forefront and offer to lead in this process.

I was just wondering about the practicality of seeking the Taliban out for discussion, because MacKay had explicitly said this waasn't possible.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

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Unfortunately, our government had blinders on--the blinders manufactured by the same blinder manufacturing outfit that was driving the White House. It's taken a lot of time and a lot of bloodshed for those blinders to come off and for people to actually understand that the picture's a little more complex than they thought.

Are we to interpret the Obama and Harper positions as solely acts of acknowledgment that negotiations are possible, or are the governments going to actively, seek to be involved in discussions with the Taliban? I can't speak for the Obama administration, but I expect that they will actively seek to play a role here. They do tend to be kind of an activist administration. As for the Stephen Harper government, I haven't really seen any evidence that they get it yet. They're mouthing the words, but have we seen the resources? No. In fact, we've seen the budgets of the diplomatic capacities of our country cut. To me, he doesn't get it.

I think he's more worried about what's happening to Michael Ignatieff and his Liberal camp/followers.... What if the Taliban don't want to talk?

There's no such thing as the Taliban. There's a more or less loose collection of those that might put thcmselves under that general categorization. All you havc to do is look at the topography and the geographical layout of communities in Afghanistan and you realize that you're talking about power structures in particular communities up and down those mountain ravines and in some of those communities in the lower lands, and, ultimately, some of the leaders have the well-being of their community at heart. If somebody's willing to have a conversation about having gotten some stability and food and economic activity, there's going to be an openness to it. It's a very large country. It has a large population. You need to go in and understand what those complexities are and [be able] to work with them.

Thank you for your time and your thoughts Mr. Layton.

Article 3

**The Taliban: local or international thugs?**

by [Michael Petrou](http://www2.macleans.ca/author/mpetrou/) on Monday, March 30, 2009 11:33pm - [6 Comments](http://www2.macleans.ca/2009/03/30/the-taliban-local-or-international-thugs/#idc-container)

[](http://macleans.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/090331_tali.jpg)Prime Minister Stephen Harper seems to think the Taliban and al-Qaeda are two very different entities – one of which poses a threat internationally, and the other a deadly but local nuisance. Here he is speaking to the Financial Times over the weekend:

“The Taliban is primarily a domestic force, not to say that it isn’t a source of significant instability and one that the Afghan government currently can’t manage on its own, but that is very different than al-Qaeda, whose target is the United States and the developed world.”

Harper is not alone in this view. And there is some evidence to support it. Few if any Afghan nationals have been tied to international terrorist attacks in places like New York, London, Bali, and Madrid. And if the Taliban are strictly an Afghan problem, sending Canadian soldiers to confront them, while noble, isn’t necessary to protect Canada from future terrorist attacks.

I personally don’t accept this argument. I think the fact that the Taliban gave al-Qaeda a base in Afghanistan the last time they ran the country is a good enough reason for Canada to fight to deny them control of territory in Afghanistan today. But I also think that Harper, and others who hold to the theory that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are distinct threats, misjudge the level of cooperation and integration between the two movements.

This is something I’ve discussed several times with the Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid, the world’s foremost authority on the Taliban, and I’ve gone over my notes from our previous discussions.

“The top leadership is very highly influenced by the ideas of al-Qaeda and global jihad,” Rashid said in a 2007 interview, describing how the Taliban have evolved. “In that sense the top leadership has moved on from where they were in the late 1990s, and of course that makes them more intransigent and more difficult to talk to.”

He described the level of cooperation between al-Qaeda and the Taliban as “very close.”

“We have seen, for example, the Taliban being introduced to Iraq, being taken to Iraq, and learning the new tactics and then coming back. And more Arabs coming from Iraq to teach the Taliban new bombs and new improvised explosive devices, and all the rest of it. That kind of cooperation has been carried on with the help of al-Qaeda.”

**Tags:** [Stephen Harper](http://www2.macleans.ca/tag/stephen-harper/), [Taliban](http://www2.macleans.ca/tag/taliban/), [Al-Qaeda](http://www2.macleans.ca/tag/al-qaeda/), [Ahmed Rashid](http://www2.macleans.ca/tag/ahmed-rashid/)