

THE CANADIAN ARMY IN AFGHANISTAN

VOLUME I: A NATION UNDER FIRE, 2001-2006

Sean M. Maloney, PhD



CANADIAN
ARMY



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CANADIENNE

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2001-2006

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FOREWORD

The first time I met Dr. Sean Maloney I was worried. It was late April 2011, and the whole weight of having one of Canada's pre-eminent military historians riding in my Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV III) and touring the district of Panjwai was bearing on me. Having taken graduate military history classes at the University of New Brunswick under Dr. Charters, Dr. Milner and Dr. Windsor in the late 90s, I had read Dr. Maloney's work on Canada's contribution to NATO, the conflict in the Balkans, peacekeeping and the Cold War. He was (and is) a larger than life persona, replete with knowledge gained from having focused his field of study on the conflict in Afghanistan for a period in the early 2000s; I was filled with trepidation as we embarked on our first battlefield circulation together.

But before I get ahead of myself, I have to admit that it is with humility and with the sense of the thousands of soldiers, special forces operators, aviators and sailors that served in Afghanistan that I write the foreword to this trilogy of books that covers the Canadian Army's involvement in Afghanistan during the combat period of 2001 to 2011. As the Acting Commander of the Canadian Army, it falls on me to lead you into this journey. As such, I am thankful for having spent time with Dr. Maloney in Afghanistan, and most recently in his home in Harrowsmith, Ontario, in November 2021. We talked about our involvement in Afghanistan ten years ago, through the current lens of what transpired in that country in the months of June, July and August 2021. The way the country fell to the Taliban weighs heavily on veterans, families, current serving members, public servants, journalists that covered the conflict, and historians. More importantly, it has victimized another generation of Afghans.

But this is not the point of these books. By reading this history, talking to teammates, and spending hours listening to the author, I have been able to put the history of those deployments in their context. It has also given me enough strength to write these words—words that I hope will incite you to tackle this multi-volume history of what was done on the ground in Afghanistan during those years. Dr. Maloney brings an informed and passionate perspective to the events. First, because he was constantly there; he regularly travelled to the theatre during those 10 years, talked to leaders, to soldiers, to Afghans, even to the enemy. He knew the players, the issues and the stakes. Second, because his work is based on interviews with all the key personnel and a keen sense of the arc of history. Lastly, because it is a vital contribution to our body of knowledge on this conflict and our contribution as a nation.

Some would say that a lot has been written on the subject, but I would disagree. Most of the literature written in English is from an American or British perspective. The Canadian angle is covered in our own limited literature by firsthand accounts written by soldiers and officers who lived the deployments, journalists who put their coverage under the larger perspective of the mission in Afghanistan, and in the words of loved ones, families and friends of those who served, who in turn have added their reflections to the mosaic of our recorded thoughts and deeds. There have been contributions to the Canadian experience from social scientists and foreign relations experts, but none that resemble this work. This monumental three-volume study is as close as we are to an official history, but also as admitted by the author in his own preamble, this is not the “final word on the Army’s involvement in Afghanistan”. It is what currently stands as the only and best attempt to place the ten years of combat operations in an accurate and chronological narrative. It strives to put in order our actions in Afghanistan from September 2001 to July 2011. It is a source to be consulted and considered when future generations study our contribution. More importantly, it provides a concrete foundation and an informed alignment of facts for future study. But for a soldier like me, and thousands of others who served in Afghanistan, and who still carry some of the visible and invisible scars of that service, this work brings back many memories.

A voyage that forces us to face the question: Was this worth it? The answer to this question is very personal. It will change through the lens of time, current events and from one person to the other. But to the veterans and their families, I submit that for me the answer remains: yes. It was worth it because the story on these pages shows that the situation in Kandahar province was very precarious in 2005–2006, and in the words of a previous Army Commander, LGen Devlin, “we held the line”. It was worth it because the provinces where we operated saw improvements during the time of Canada’s combat mission. It was worth it because, just like it has through its history, it showed that Canada was a capable and trusted military partner when the NATO Alliance invoked Article 5. It was worth it because I am convinced that the soldiers we lost would believe that it was. While this sentiment will not be shared by all, the stories in these pages show the sacrifice, the toll, but also the innovation shown by troops on the ground. Through these pages you will travel through Afghanistan: from Kabul to Kandahar, from Spin Boldak to Maywand, from Panjwai to Arghandab, and beyond. We served where we were needed across Afghanistan, whether in an assigned locality, or elsewhere in support of our partners and allies. You will be forced to revisit the losses we incurred, but you will also learn that we answered the call, made a difference, and for that the nation can be proud.

As I reflect back on why I was worried to be patrolling Panjwai with Dr. Maloney in the back of my LAV III—he chatting to me on the vehicle intercom—it is because I was keenly aware that the Roto 10 Battle-Group was writing the last chapter of these books. We were the last rotation involved in combat operations, and we were there at the very early stages of the last Afghan summer fighting season on behalf of Canada. We had been hard at work over the last five months flooding our zone with Afghan and Coalition combat power, pushing the enemy out of our district and taking away the materiel and safe havens he needed to conduct operations. Building on the success of the previous rotations, we had finally had the benefit of overwhelming forces compounded by the ability to focus on a single district. This gave us a chance. But as always, the enemy had a vote, and now I had a historian in my vehicle. I knew he had seen every previous rotation, he knew some of the challenges previous Canadian Army units had faced, and was a wealth of knowledge to our team, but he was there and we were unsure how the months of May, June and July would play out as we completed this chapter of Canadian military history. If you don't know how this story ends, I will let you read that in the last pages of the third book, but for now I encourage you to embark on this journey. See through these books, the work, the actions, the successes, but also the trials and heartbreak of a generation of Canadian soldiers.

Thank you Sean for your passion, your perspective and your contribution to the telling of the story of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan.

Vigilamus pro te

Je me souviens

Michel-Henri St-Louis, OMM, MSC, MSM, CD

Acting Commander Canadian Army, and previously,
Commander of the last Battle-Group in Panjwai

17 December 2021,
Kingston, Ontario

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2007, Chief of the Land Staff Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie asked me to ensure that the Army's historical record in Afghanistan was collected, written, and published. Since I had already traveled to Afghanistan on several occasions in support of a variety of Canadian activities, and my interest in and dedication to understanding the complex Afghan scene was known, I was then reassigned from the Royal Military College to the Chief of the Land Staff to carry out these tasks. Without his vision this project would not have existed. Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin maintained his support once Lieutenant-General Leslie departed. After a period of imposed delay, Chief of Defence Staff General Jon Vance and Canadian Army Commander Lieutenant-General Wayne Eyre confirmed that the project would be completed. I would like to thank them all for providing the leadership, the will, and the resources to do so.

The nature and extent of the history grew over time and necessitated that I have an assistant. Major Marta Rzechowka proved to be resilient, effective, highly motivated and, most importantly, loyal over the years. She is greatly deserving of thanks, as are Major-General Derek Macaulay and Lieutenant Colonel Douglas McNair, without whose efforts this history would have remained in limbo. I wish also to recognize the assistance of members of the Land, later Army, staff.

The Ottawa bureaucratic environment is not one I usually operate in. It has its own special codes, language, and expectations. In some cases, these competed with the timely and effective completion of this history. I am indebted to a number of people who understood the importance of having the Army's history in Afghanistan written and published, and to those who assisted me in this particular parallel campaign. I would like to thank Dr. Joel Sokolsky, Major-General Alan Howard, Brigadier-General David Anderson, Brigadier-General Christian Drouin, Brigadier-General Simon Hetherington, Brigadier-General Mike Rouleau, Colonel Ian Hope, Colonel Roger Cotton, Colonel Mike St Louis, Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Graham, Lieutenant-Colonel Vincent Giroux, Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Adams, Major Chris Comeau, Major Jim Fitzgerald, Major Brian Hynes and Major Steven Moritsugu (contemporary ranks).

Over the years and on several rotations, I could always rely on Major Quentin Innis for challenging debates over the nature of what was later labelled "white situational awareness." Quentin's out-of-the-box approach to Afghanistan (and life) was as steadfast as his commitment to the Canadian mission and the Afghan people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Likewise, thank you to Renata Pistone, Christina Green, Andrew Scyner, and Michael Callan from the Canadian International Development Agency, and Chris Alexander, Pam Isfeld, Jennie Chen, Ken Lewis, Barbara Martin, Gavin Buchan, and Neil Clegg from the (former) Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The criticisms I levelled at their parent organizations herein do not apply to them.

It is easy to fall into a perspective problem when drafting such a detailed manuscript. I asked a number of colleagues with differing areas of expertise to read the work and provide me with feedback. Dr. David Last, a political scientist at the Royal Military College of Canada, was one representation of a polar opposite political and methodological outlook to mine. Michael Whitby, a veteran of writing the official Royal Canadian Navy histories at the Directorate of History and Heritage was another. Major Sean Wyatt, a well-read, highly experienced officer was the third. Finally, Dr. Kim Nossal at the Queen's School for Policy Studies also provided his experienced views. Their insights and arguments have been most valuable.

On par with these informal reviews was the operational security review undertaken by Major Gordon Ohlke with the concurrence of the Chief of Defence Intelligence. Major Ohlke's experiences as an intelligence officer in, and dealing with, Afghanistan proved especially valuable time and again.

Over the years, I have also relied on the wise counsel of Les Grau from the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth. Les, a veteran of Vietnam as well as United States Army bureaucracy, is the preeminent United States Army expert on Afghanistan, but also has an instinctive understanding of the human dimensions of counterinsurgency war, which I drew on time and again.

I traveled to Afghanistan on numerous occasions between 2003 and 2014 to observe operations and provide advice. The ability to closely observe and participate in operations contributed immeasurably to this history. In the early days, the then-Major-General Michel Maisonneuve, Director General Strategic Plans, and then-Major-General Andrew Leslie, acting Vice Chief of the Defence Staff and the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff were the primary sponsoring agencies and saw the value of my analysis of what was going on in Afghanistan. Once the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command was up and running, its Commander, Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, approved my in-theatre deployments on a regular basis and his staff staved off elements attempting to interfere with these movements.

It is impossible to thank everyone who contributed to my understanding of the environment in Afghanistan and operations within it. Nevertheless, I would like to thank all of the junior officers and soldiers that I accompanied on combat operations over the years at the tactical level. At no time in the field did I feel I was dealing with anything less

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

than professional and exceptionally competent people. I would especially like to reciprocate the trust they put in me and give context to what they were doing. Second, all of the unit commanding officers, deputy commanding officers, and staffs played a role in assisting me with this history in one way or another. There is simply not enough space here to thank everyone personally but those who assisted me have my respect and deepest gratitude.

I would also like to thank the Canadian staff at Regional Command (South) over the years, particularly Major-General David Fraser, Lieutenant-General Marc Lessard, Lieutenant-General Marquis Hainse, Brigadier-General André Corbould, Colonel Spike Hazleton, Colonel René Melançon, Colonel Tim Bishop, Lieutenant-Colonel Shane Schreiber, Lieutenant-Colonel Harjit Sajjan, Major Julie Roberge, and Captain Darcy Heddon-Chalmers.

The Joint Task Force-Afghanistan Headquarters commanders all played a role in assisting with this history. Thank you to Major-General Tim Grant, Brigadier-General Guy Laroche, Major-General Denis Thompson, General Jon Vance, and Major-General Dean Milner. I should also mention that although they rarely get mentioned in any capacity, the deputy commanders of Joint Task Force-Afghanistan Headquarters played a key role in assisting me in various ways and means. Thank you to Colonel Christian Juneau, Colonel Roch Lacroix, Brigadier-General Richard Giguère and especially Colonel Jamie Cade for his insights over the years.

For a number of years, I had a special relationship with the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar. For that, I would like to thank Lieutenant-General Steve Bowes, Colonel Bob Chamberlain, Lieutenant-Colonel Dana Woodworth, their staffs, and particularly the force protection companies on those rotations. In later years, Bill Harris from the United States Department of State was a particularly valued interlocutor. I would be remiss if I did not especially thank the commanding officers of the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan, particularly Colonel Mike Capstick, Colonel Don Dixon, Brigadier-General Serge Labbé, and all of their personnel. The hospitality and insight provided was critical in understanding the bigger picture.

It is equally crucial that I acknowledge all of the interpreters whom I worked with over the years. Again, there are too many people to thank individually and in many cases, we used *noms de guerre* for operational security reasons, so I will collectively thank them as they played a significant and sometimes dramatic role in helping to understand the Afghanistan environment – Canada is indebted to each of them. Similarly, my contacts within the Kandahari power structure must remain anonymous, but their insights and even their attempts at manipulating my perceptions proved extremely useful.

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In addition to all of the Canadian battle group commanders and company and squadron commanders, I would like to thank some of our allies: Colonel Chris Vernon, United Kingdom Army; Colonel Trey Turner, United States Air Force; Lieutenant Colonel Dan Hurlbut, 2-2 Infantry; Lieutenant Colonel James Benson, 4-101st Aviation Regiment; and particularly Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Bourne, 1st Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles, as well as Major Randy Graddic, United States Army.

There were innumerable people in the Canadian and allied intelligence and special operations forces communities who assisted year in, year out. They cannot be named in this forum but I thank them nonetheless.

Thank you also to the support staff at the Directorate of Land Combat Development who handled our administrative support for a number of years: Shaunna Lee, Petty Officer 2nd Class Andria Coward and Corporal Kirby Dickson.

I would be gravely remiss if I did not profusely thank Brian Rogers and Steven Lukits for providing invaluable legal support regarding this project.

Finally, to Mullah Omar and his supporters, as well as those who facilitated the activities of the suicide bomber that destroyed my vehicle, wounded two Canadians, and murdered nine Afghan men, women and children on 21 June 2006, the evil that he and his colleagues perpetrated that day gave me the resolve to see this project through to the end. Our successful attempts to thwart their inhuman objectives and assist the Afghan people are now permanently recorded in our history and in the history of Afghanistan. Our implementation may have been problematic, the outcome may be less than desired, but our cause was just. As the good book says:

“Allah loves those who act justly.”

(Surat al-Maida, 42)

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

God send me to see suche a company together agayne when need is.

- Lord Howard of Effingham.

He did and it was.

The Canadian Army in Afghanistan was written immediately after the completion of Canadian Army combat operations in Afghanistan in July 2011. The close proximity of this history to the events depicted herein will undoubtedly raise questions relating to the nature of history, objective distance, and the personal involvement of the author in the conflict. My response is that history will always be a moving target subjected to the Rashomon Effect, and there will be constant ideological interpretation and reinterpretation of events and decisions given contemporary political pressures and other factors, many of them personal.

There are different types of history. This is only one of them. An overview cannot hope to capture every aspect of the conflict. To achieve that aim, a variety of works are required including personal memoirs, tactical narratives, and technical and organizational history. That said, *The Canadian Army in Afghanistan* is not intended to be the final word on the Army's involvement in Afghanistan. By necessity, some things must be compressed because of space, time, and readability. Given the nature of the conflict as well as the classified and technical nature of many Canadian successes, and with many misconceptions extant in the public domain, it is crucial that an accurate chronology of events and an initial narrative be written to capture what happened, based on what is known now.

I fully expect that this depiction of the events that occurred between 2001 to 2011 will be challenged and fully expect successors to produce other works, in due course, with perhaps better information or through the creation of a new lens from which to view the same data. Someone, however, has to initiate that process so we can learn from the Canadian Army's experiences. The dialogue and debates on the contents of these volumes must continue. The Canadian Army's involvement in this conflict has many nuances that should not be lost over time or to expediency. There is a lot to learn, but only if we are able, as Canadians, to unflinchingly look the Afghanistan experience in the face and assess what was accomplished, what was not, and why. That was the task given to me by the Chief of the Land Staff, with the approval of the Chief of Defence Staff, in 2007.

A no less important aspect of this project is its unapologetic Canadian outlook. The existing literature in the United States and in the United Kingdom dealing with the war in Afghanistan has, thus far, virtually written Canada out of history. Worse, American or British failures are now assumed to be Canadian failures as well. Where Canada or the Canadian Army is mentioned, it is cursory in nature, derisive in tone, or both. The bulk of the non-Canadian literature does not give Canadian soldiers their just due in any respect whatsoever. Given what Canadians accomplished and sacrificed during the course of the conflict, this is unconscionable, though understandable – it is not a new phenomenon. As a mature nation, however, we must take responsibility for our own history. We need to stop relying on what others think, feel, or believe as the basis of what we, as Canadians, should think, feel, and believe. Those who asked me to undertake this project understood this problem.

The Canadian Army in Afghanistan benefitted from access to a wide variety of primary sources, access to the battle space while operations were in progress, and access to participants both during and after operations. Indeed, greater than 95% of the text of both volumes is based on primary sources. If I may quote Charles Stacey's preface from *Six Years of War*:

It may be noted that many of the documents referred to are still 'classified', and the fact that they are cited does not necessarily imply that they are available for public examination. In spite of this, it has been thought best to give the references, since a documented narrative carries more weight than an undocumented one even when the sources cannot be produced; and many of the classified documents cited will presumably become available to students in due course.¹

That said, the interpretation of events is the responsibility of the author and these volumes in no way reflect any official opinion, nor would I want them to. Again, those who asked me to undertake this project asked me to produce it with as few institutional constraints as possible. This generated considerable friction with those who ignored their intent later. These volumes now adhere to the original mandate.

Additionally, I have employed a highly modified and extremely simplified North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) symbology for the map sketches in these volumes to make them more accessible to a broader audience as existing systems proved too cumbersome and threatened to overwhelm the reader.

This project was undertaken in good faith. I would strongly encourage those who participated in the war in Afghanistan to put their experiences and thoughts on paper, particularly if they expand, enhance, correct, or even contradict, anything contained in these volumes. History is, and will always be, a multi-faceted diamond. *The Canadian Army in Afghanistan* is merely the first cut.

ENDNOTE

1. C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume I: Six Years of War: The Canadian Army in Canada, Britain, and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, 1955), pp. xi-xii.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Army's involvement in Afghanistan after the 11 September attacks of 2001 was as dramatic as it was historically significant. The conflict in Afghanistan was Canada's first major shooting war since Korea in the 1950s and was also the first long term counterinsurgency campaign undertaken by not only the Army, but the Government of Canada. Acts of valour by Canadian men and women, not seen outside of the pages of Second World War history books, once again became commonplace. The war in Afghanistan reminded Canadians that the peacekeeping paradigm, which for so long dominated the Canadian worldview, reflected an earlier, even mythological, golden age. Canada was now up against a new type of enemy, global in scope, agile and adaptable. This enemy retained sweeping goals that apparently had the sanction of a higher power. Those goals were coupled with the ability to draw on seemingly unlimited manpower. In some ways our new enemy was similar to those totalitarians we had dealt with in the past. The enemy was led by men who were determined to impose their extreme worldview on others using violence. We, as Canadians, chose not to accept this worldview as it conflicted with our system of values and our global interests. A diplomatic compromise with such men was not possible and military action was the only appropriate response given the magnitude of this new challenge.

Among 3000 others, 25 Canadians were killed in the 9/11 attacks by Al Qaeda, an organization that hid behind a shield provided by the Pakistan-supported Taliban movement in Afghanistan. That movement conquered and subjugated parts of Afghanistan, and then permitted Al Qaeda planning cells, communications, training facilities and bio-chemical laboratories to expand on Afghan soil. Such entities could not be confronted using traditional Canadian international affairs methodology; who or what was there to negotiate with, given that the Taliban regime was not a recognized, legitimate government? Should Canadians have seriously discussed the dismantling of our political, religious and economic systems to satisfy self-appointed "commanders of the faithful" like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri? Should we have caved in to their threats in order to prevent more loss of life? These notions were as absurd as they were unrealistic.

It was evident that the United States, the most aggrieved target of the attacks and the most militarily capable, would take the lead in going after the perpetrators. Canadian foreign affairs specialists, including many people who laboured for most of their careers to differentiate and distance Canada from the United States, now had to alter course as Canadian and American interests converged over Afghanistan. At the same time, Canada's

military contribution had to remain distinct and salient. Those tensions would resonate in Canadian circles over the next decade, as the level of Canadian Army involvement was determined in Ottawa while operations were carried out in the field.

During those debates, wherein levels of commitment were discussed in back rooms and sometimes in the media sphere, it was easy to lose track of the original objectives and intent of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. First, the larger, globalized Al Qaeda threat had to be understood and confronted. This necessitated the removal of the Taliban regime that shielded it. Subsequent to that, an assessment of Al Qaeda's strategic reach had to be undertaken in the ruins of its training centres and bio-chemical laboratories situated in Afghanistan. In theory, that information would allow for coalition action on a global scale to counter the various projects already put in motion by that organization. Al Qaeda would be disrupted, forced to re-locate, and start again but this time with eyes watching out for its deadly activities.

Then there was Afghanistan itself. Renewed fighting among various factions had to be avoided. Some form of governance had to be established before the international community would invest in reconstruction efforts.

All of these incremental, painstaking efforts had to be shielded from renewed attempts by the former regime and its allies to re-establish themselves in the country. Collaterally protecting the strategic success of the removal of the Taliban regime, as it manifested itself throughout the global media sphere, became critical, particularly because the audience included millions of potential future adversaries. Al Qaeda sought to reverse this major defeat and, as a result, accelerated efforts to demonstrate success to its global audience. This acceleration occurred even though and perhaps because Al Qaeda was being defeated on another front in Iraq, countered in Somalia, challenged in the Philippines, and thwarted in its repeated attempts to hijack or destroy civilian airliners throughout the world.

By comparison, the coalition reconstruction effort in Afghanistan was a tempting collection of fragile targets. There were plenty of aggrieved potential enemy allies, including a revitalized Taliban movement, who could be employed as proxies in such a fight. Afghanistan was one front in Al Qaeda's war, while it became the only front left for a renewed Taliban and their Afghan and Pakistani allies.

As the war progressed, it was increasingly evident that the threat to the reconstruction effort was multifaceted. It was no longer "The Taliban," supported by Al Qaeda, versus "The Coalition." A variety of elements - what historian David C. Isby calls "The Vortex" - diluted the ideological purity, if it ever really existed, of Mullah Omar's Taliban movement. Narcotics producers, narcotics transporters, Islamist non-governmental organizations, Islamist elements in the various Pakistani intelligence and security services, financiers, trucking mafias, individual jihadists from all over the world, plus a variety of commercial

interests all joined or profited from the fight. Some of these elements even overlapped or became intertwined with elements in the emergent Afghan government. What started off as a straightforward, good-versus-evil adversarial fight ended up as something much murkier. It gave the Canadian Army, Canadian citizens and their leaders an education on the functioning of the rest of the world outside of North America, and on the limits of the supposedly traditional Canadian “peacekeeping” worldview.

The various Canadian Army commitments to Afghanistan over a 10-year period fit within a particular strategic framework. One can debate the specifics of how each commitment was reached, or how much continuity there was between commitments although there was a near-continuous presence of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan for 12 years. Fundamentally, however, there were eight discrete periods of involvement from 2001 to 2014:

- 2001-2002** The removal of the Taliban regime and strategic intelligence exploitation efforts versus Al Qaeda through Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.
- 2003-2004** The stabilization of Kabul and the prevention of a renewed civil war through the medium of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).
- 2005** Initial efforts to identify problems in and stabilize Kandahar Province.
- 2006** The defence of Kandahar City and environs, the prevention of the collapse of the international effort in Helmand province, and the facilitation of ISAF expansion.
- 2007-2009** The disruption of expanded enemy efforts on the approaches to Kandahar City and the shielding of development efforts in Kandahar Province.
- 2009-2010** The influx of American reinforcements and retraction of the Canadian area of responsibility.
- 2011** The withdrawal of Canadian forces from Kandahar.
- 2011-2014** The Canadian commitment to the NATO training mission in Afghanistan.

The Canadian Army in Afghanistan will follow this structure. Unlike any other Canadian military historical account, this book must also reconcile the strategic, operational, and tactical perspectives. It must also discuss non-traditional facets of the 21st century counterinsurgency war. The traditional approach to Canadian military history involves having separate books or works dealing specifically with the operational/tactical or strategic/operational levels. Entire books are devoted to extreme tactical detail of a given battalion or regiment. In Afghanistan, the size of the Canadian forces deployed would only rate at the traditional tactical level in a 20th century military history. However, in 21st century military history, the employment of the Canadian Army's tactical forces had significant operational and strategic level effects. In a similar vein there were new types of units that had no historical equivalent, for example, security force capacity building and reconstruction and development units. These units operated in an integrated fashion alongside traditional combat arms units and thus required a novel narrative structure.

All of these factors demand a radically different approach to any history dealing with the Canadian effort in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that tactical units were employed as the primary level of military activity, this work cannot cover all of the extreme tactical detail a unit history demands. It must select actions that were representative of the whole or otherwise salient. Similarly, at the other end of the spectrum, the diplomatic and strategic machinations and posturing between Ottawa, Washington, NATO in Brussels or others sometimes had an impact on events down to the tactical level, but extreme detail of those processes would detract from our narrative as we are dealing primarily with the Canadian Army. Likewise, the reluctant but progressive expansion of interdepartmental cooperation and non-cooperation could – and should – be the subject of dissertations and memoirs in the future.

This work is about the Canadian Army, specifically the Canadian Army in Afghanistan. It is not an attempt to write interdepartmental history, nor is it an attempt to reconcile the perspectives of other governmental departments with those of the Army's. Suffice it to say, interdepartmental cooperation was problematic during the course of Canada's stay in Afghanistan and any history glossing over those problems will miss an important aspect of our involvement in that country. It will also do a disservice to those who need to learn from such problems to support future operations.

Our understanding of the enemy and how their motives and behaviour relate to the ebb and flow of the war in Afghanistan must, for the time being, remain somewhat conjectural. We do not have anything equivalent to the captured German document collections that historians of the Second World War had access to, nor will we for some time, if ever. We can see how insurgent activity manifested itself and how that changed over time. We have insight into the enemy's methodology. That said, this work does not pretend to be a balanced,

detailed treatise on the Taliban movement and its allies, or their beliefs, or values system. This is a history of the Canadian Army's efforts to combat them and it does not seek to reconcile the Canadian position, moral or otherwise, with those of the insurgents. It is not the purpose of this history to engage in a moral equivalency debate or other pedagogical games. Others can do that later once a basic narrative and chronology has been established. Similarly, this history is not one of the Canadian Armed Forces disciplinary system in Afghanistan, nor is it a legal treatise or does it seek to address public controversy raised during the war. This is a history about Canadians and their allies in Afghanistan, written by a Canadian military historian who traveled to Afghanistan on many occasions during the war to observe, record, and explain what the Canadian Army did.

Canada's war in Afghanistan was unlike any in its history. The nation was forced by circumstances to take an army that was institutionally forged during the Cold War (where the enemy was clearly identifiable), and subsequently modified in the 1990s to conduct stabilization operations (where there are, theoretically, no enemies) and send it into battle against an astute enemy unfettered by either conventional warfare paradigms or moral constraints. This was all done in the very public glare of global and domestic media scrutiny, which in itself was a type of weapon that employed novel methodology. This was coupled to a hyper-legalized environment where the minutiae of our own laws could be turned against us by interest groups (and even by individuals) to constrain Canadian effectiveness on the battlefield. At the same time, the country was subjected to the psychological effects of an improvised explosive device bombing campaign that was, in part, designed to weaken the will of Canadian people and their leaders. The Taliban and its allies had greater access to the Canadian national psyche than Joseph Goebbels ever dreamed of having back in the 1940s. The new information and influence environment had a profound effect on how the Canadian Army fought the war in Afghanistan.

In addition, there were other novel aspects of the war. Canada employed tanks, weapons that were deemed unsuited to 21st Century warfare by numerous uniformed and civilian pundits. There were the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device groups that operated at the tactical level but generated strategic effects. There was the Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan, interagency units that have no real parallel in Canadian military history but were critical in the counterinsurgency and development aspects of the conflict. The Embedded Training Teams and Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams had some basis in the Army's Cold War experience but working and living alongside Afghan soldiers and police took the training of indigenous security forces to a whole new level. Civil-military cooperation and psychological operations capacities, long dormant, were activated and expanded. And there were the Special Operations Forces, the modernized version of the historical Second World War raiding capability, a new Devil's Brigade wreaking havoc at night on the enemy's command structure and bomb makers.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan was also Canada's Generation X's first war. Derided by 1990s cultural commentators as lazy, self-absorbed hedonists and slackers, Gen Xers proved otherwise by leading the Canadian Army's efforts from brigade down to company level. Generation Y, another group considered to be problematic by social critics, formed the cadre of privates, corporals, and second lieutenants at the sharp end of the fight. This was not a Baby Boomer war. If this history had a soundtrack, it would be Metallica's "Black Album." "Enter Sandman" played on iPod speakers as Canadian M-777 guns fired on the enemy at night, and "Broken, Beaten and Scarred" with its "We die hard!" refrain was a favourite in some convoys, not Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Run Through the Jungle" or The Rolling Stones "Paint it Black." This was a generation of soldiers who understood the value of social networking sites, could relax in their forward operating bases playing first-person shooter videogames after patrols, and could teleconference with their loved ones, all without having a deleterious impact on their ability to absorb horrific violence and to combat the insurgency in some of the most primitive environments on earth. We, as Canadians, should be proud of them for their dedication, their sacrifice, and their valour.

AN ABORTED PEACE:

DISPATCHES FROM KABUL, 1990-1992

The Canadian Army's involvement with Afghanistan pre-dated Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks. At the end of the Cold War and during the immediate post-Cold War period, the ideological antagonists withdrew from their engagements in the Third World. Far from reaping a peace dividend, the release of suppressed animosities or emergent nationalism resulted in many parts of the world descending into extreme violence. In many cases, the United Nations was brought in to broker ceasefires and withdrawals in Latin America, Africa, and in Asia. One of these missions was the United Nations Good Offices in Afghanistan and Pakistan or UNGOMAP. UNGOMAP's task was to observe the implementation of the 1988 Geneva Accords and amounted to watching the massive Soviet war machine leave Afghanistan.¹ When the withdrawal was completed, UNGOMAP was handed over to the Office of the Secretary General for Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP), which became a coordinating body for UN activities in Afghanistan.

In April 1989, during the period after the Soviet pull-out, the Canadian government committed Canadian military engineers to a UN mission called the Mine Awareness and Clearance Training Programme (MACTP). Administered by OSGAP, the MACTP was created by the UN as part of its larger reconstruction program for Afghanistan. The MACTP was established to train Afghan deminers in Islamabad, Pakistan, where they would then transition to Afghan non-governmental demining organizations inside Afghanistan.²

The Canadian contribution to MACTP was called Operation DECIMAL. There were four rotations from March 1989 to July 1990, each consisting of 12 combat engineers drawn from units across Canada. Working in small teams out of Quetta and Peshawar, Pakistan, the Canadians trained an estimated 10 500 Afghan men and women in the hazardous art of demining. The task was handed over to non-governmental civilian organizations and the Canadian troops returned home by the fall of 1990.³

The "decent interval" after the Soviet withdrawal did not last. The various Mujahideen groups supported by Pakistan and Iran were re-energized and launched assaults on the Afghan Communist regime led by Mohammad Najibullah.

OSGAP was not set up as a peacekeeping mission; in many ways, it was the predecessor to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) established a decade later. However, OSGAP maintained a Military Advisory Unit in Kabul just in case the UN was asked to provide peacekeeping forces in the region. Canada agreed to deploy a

lieutenant-colonel for a year as part of the Military Advisory Unit.⁴ It was understood by the Department of National Defence that “OSGAP is a small mission without a formal mandate. It is in effect a reconnaissance-in-place. Its future and utility are often questioned.”⁵ Initially stationed in Islamabad, LCol Harry Mohr was the first Canadian with OSGAP. His successor, LCol Mark Skidmore, deployed to Kabul in 1992. Their observations and reports spanning the period May 1991 to December 1992 when OSGAP was withdrawn, were folded into Canadian embassy reporting by Ambassador Louis Delvoie in Islamabad to Ottawa. Canadian observations during this time provide us with context for Canada’s eventual deep involvement in Afghanistan.

Benon Sevan from Cyprus was the UN representative who took on the Sisyphean task of attempting to achieve peace in the wake of the Geneva Accords. The Canadian report of 23 May 1991 revealed the obstacles placed in his path:

[Sevan’s] strategy emphasizes a unique bottom-up approach for any Afghanistan negotiation, which seeks agreement of all Afghan groups at early stages in the negotiating process. This would help avoid the weakness of the Geneva Accord, which had agreement from the major international actors but little impact on the ground in Afghanistan. The task ahead for Sevan is to thrash out a transitional arrangement that would actually be adhered to by the divergent Afghan factions. Given the Afghans fratricidal nature, this task is daunting.... For about a month, Sevan has pursued a blistering pace of meetings in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan to develop the framework for negotiations...he is convinced that all the major international players are ready to support his peace effort but he is irritated by the games played by the Pak intelligence agency ISI. On one hand the Pakistan gov’t [sic], including the PM, President and Foreign Minister, have all endorsed a negotiated settlement, yet ISI continues to play its war game through its continued support and guidance of the Afghan extremists.⁶

Notably, and prophetically,

Sevan’s efforts to create a realistic process to establish a framework for Afghan peace negotiations merits support by Canada. The ball is now in the court of the leadership of the myriad of Afghan factions who must decide whether a share in power of transition government is worth more to them than the personal gains they may have received through a decade of protracted warfare.⁷

By August 1991, Sevan had made headway and all of the antagonists agreed to talk peace. This included notable Afghan Mujahideen leaders Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Yunus Khalis, and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who will all be discussed again later in Volume I.

Despite the fact that Pakistani President Nawaz Sharif endorsed the peace plan, and the Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs reached out to get the Mujahideen to the table, Canadians reported that “the Pak military and ISI are maintaining and in some cases stepping up their covert assistance to the Mujahideen’s military campaign.”⁸

More progress was made in August 1991 toward determining what a transitional government would look like:

Composition of the transitional government becomes an exercise in seeking common ground, that is, finding out who is acceptable to both sides rather than dividing power or authority, a concept quite alien to Afghan culture. At the end of the six-month period, a national Loya Jirga (Tribal Council or Convention) would meet to select a new interim government. A second stage interim government would write a new national constitution and hold nation-wide elections. These elections would be held on a non-party basis with the electoral competition among personalities. This would be done to avoid splits based on parties that have only limited regional or ethnic appeal.⁹

However, “Najibullah the Communist” had to be removed for this to take place, but he was not willing to leave. And then there was Hekmatyar:

Although moderate parties mistrust the ruthless and ambitious Hekmatyar, they believe it is better having him inside their Afghan tent rather than outside to avoid a problem...¹⁰

The peace process stalled throughout the fall of 1991. By January 1992 Canadian observers noted “The Pakistan military and particularly the military intelligence agency (ISI) have long favoured a military solution to the Afghan question and have been known for their favouritism towards Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s fundamentalist Hezbe Islami organization.”¹¹

In February 1992, Sevan was making headway but there were serious problems:

Sevan used an Afghan metaphor to describe the UN peace process as ‘a carpet we are weaving together’....The three moderate Peshawar-based [Mujahideen] parties have endorsed the peace process, whereas the three fundamentalist parties have rejected it. Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami is by far the most significant. It is well organized, well disciplined. Its regular use of assassination to terrorize its opponent strikes fear amongst moderate Afghans.¹²

Hekmatyar, presumably reflecting the proclivities of those who backed him, asserted that “no ceasefire should take place as long as the Najibullah regime is in power.” And the UN peace plan was based on inclusiveness. That said, it appeared as though the process might work.

In anticipation of that occurrence, movement was made in March 1992 to look at providing Canadian resources to a possible Afghan mission:

Early diplomatic contact will also be necessary to establish working contact for aid, trade, immigration, and other aspects of normal bilateral relations. CIDA should be prepared for an appeal for reconstruction assistance from both the UN system and the new transition government.... As part of the 'Golden Triangle' and a major centre of drug production and export, it will be in the RCMP's best interest to consider establishing liaison arrangements with the new Afghan government.... Canada may be approached to expand its military participation in OSGAP or to participate in a new UN peace-keeping mechanism. Although trade potential is limited, there may also be some trade opportunities for Canadian firms.¹³

All bets were off by April 1992 as the ISI-supported fundamentalist Mujahideen offensive ground toward Najibullah-held Kabul:

These plans are now out the window. During the last three weeks, events have been accelerating at such a pace that the UN can no longer wait for such a drawn-out process to succeed. Simply put, the Najibullah government is on the verge of collapse. If it did collapse, Kabul would fall into chaos and anarchy, and any possibility of a negotiated settle[ment] would evaporate.¹⁴

Bagram Air Field north of Kabul fell to Mujahideen forces on 15 April 1992, and Najibullah requested that the UN evacuate him. The UN rushed to establish some form of transitional government; the Canadian observers were pessimistic about this. They believed that the fundamentalist "hardliners will be encouraged to pursue the military option. If chaos [ensues] all Afghans will be the losers."¹⁵

Two days later, Najibullah was deposed by a coup d'état led by generals who had links to the moderate Tajik Mujahideen leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud. OSGAP gave Najibullah sanctuary in the UN compound in Kabul. Canadian reports stated, "The Afghan Mujahideen are now in a power feeding-frenzy."¹⁶

Massoud, who was not beholden to the ISI-supported factions in Peshawar, was increasingly seen as an enemy by the newly styled "Peshawar Mujahideen Council" as he and his supporters had stolen the march on them. Canadian analysis concluded "At this crucial juncture, the Peshawar-based leadership is once again out to lunch" and was "impotent" in the face of the moderates despite their "huffing and puffing."¹⁷ Canadian observers believed that "One should not rule [out] the possibility of a head-on clash between the forces of Massoud and Hekmatyar which could be sparked by their ideological differences or the deep animosities the two guerrilla leaders feel for each other." They warned that "the stakes are high.

Even if a transition government is put in place, many difficult issues will have to be dealt with, including the problem of establishing some sort of law and order in a country that has become accustomed to war and anarchy.”¹⁸

On 25 April 1992, the Mujahideen groups entered Kabul with no resistance. The moderate Mujahideen worked to establish an interim government under Dr. Mojadedi, while Hekmatyar and his supporters worked to undermine it¹⁹ and the Pakistani government announced that they had reached a ceasefire accommodation between all of the factions. Reports from Kabul suggested otherwise:

A loose alliance of guerrilla forces led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, ethnic militias, and government troops loyal to Massoud dominate the city. However, the fundamentalist Hezb-i-Islami Mujahideen are continuing their attempts to gain control of strategic areas. Fighting has varied from scattered skirmishes to full-scale rocket and artillery barrages. Afghan Air Force jets have bombed and strafed a Hezb-i-Islami guerrilla enclave to the south of the Afghan capital. The most vicious fighting has occurred when ethnic militias from the north have attempted to cleanse sectors of the capital of Hezb-i-Islami guerrillas. The current fighting has made a mockery of a Pakistani-supported ceasefire....the praise that the Pakistani Government has been heaping on itself has reached almost comical proportions.²⁰

OSGAP headquarters was rocketed and vehicles were shot at during the chaos. An Uzbek militia, led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, arrived to help Massoud and together routed Hekmatyar’s forces from the city; they subsequently retired to the hills and bombarded Kabul in retaliation.²¹ The factions called for a truce. By coincidence, a man from Saudi Arabia who knew Hekmatyar and Massoud well had just been expelled from the Arabian Peninsula and recently arrived in Pakistan. He was rushed forward by the Pakistanis to mediate between the two fighters over the radio, but Hekmatyar would not budge. The Saudi intermediary departed Pakistan for the Sudan.²²

Benon Sevan approached Mojadedi and asked him if it was a good idea to deploy a UN peacekeeping force to Kabul. He was told, “the only ones who can stabilize the situation are the Afghans themselves.” Canadian observers noted:

The sad reality of these remarks is that even after installation in Kabul, the Peshawar-based leaders continue to harbour their delusions of grandeur and inflated self-importance. Despite the need for strong leadership to coordinate a massive reconstruction and rehabilitation effort, petty politics continue to be the priority. Both Mojadedi and Rabbani are milquetoast-like characters and fall far short of meeting Afghanistan’s pressing need for strong executive leadership.²³

Ambassador Delvoie recommended the withdrawal of the Canadian OSGAP observers, given the dangerous state of affairs that had emerged:

We have been unable to discern what their residual mandate is, or exactly what it is they are actually doing beyond collecting info. It seems to us that those OSGAP officers assigned on a rotating basis to OSGAP office in Kabul are being unnecessarily exposed to real danger for no good purpose whatsoever....²⁴

As the factions settled into Kabul, LCol Mark Skidmore reported that the situation was calm for the moment but dangerous, and that it was difficult to patrol and collect information.²⁵ Factions associated with Hekmatyar, Rabbani, Massoud and Dostum occupied different parts of Kabul, and ethnic Hazaras were returning. It was difficult to ascertain what was happening outside of Kabul. Hekmatyar was “the critical and unknown factor.”²⁶

The new Afghan government tried to work with the UN. Indeed, the idea of a *loya jirga* was revived by the new Foreign Minister, a certain Hamid Karzai, who Canadian observers reported was “charismatic, cosmopolitan, and speaks excellent English. He also has poor timing.” Discussions with allies noted that there was a consensus for holding a “shura” but the American representatives possessed a “near-apocalyptic vision of future developments in Afghanistan’s large scale armed conflict between Dostum, Hekmatyar, Massoud, and other factions across Afghanistan.”²⁷

LCol Skidmore’s final dispatch on 8 December 1992 reported that the:

Rabbani government is attempting to organize [a shura] to settle the country’s leadership and direction.... Parties are still disagreeing on levels of representation.... Fundamentalist Hekmatyar adamantly opposed to participation of former Communist Dostum. Pragmatists like Rabbani recognize that Dostum controls north and must be included.... Lacking any central authority, even in the capital, the government cannot ensure the security of shura delegates...new fighting reported around important Shindand airbase near Herat, Commander Ismael Khan has captured the base but it now appears that Hekmatyar forces are trying to recapture it. Situation in Kabul does not look promising. Rumours of coups abound in Kabul with defence minister Massoud, Dostum, and even old communist Khalq party as the alleged authors. Coup is unlikely though as there is little real power or authority to take over from....

Skidmore also noted:

Duty in Kabul lasted until withdrawal of all personnel on order of Permanent Representative of the Secretary General. ... Evac [sic] by vehicle on 07 December 1992. Security situation in Kabul at time of the withdrawal was tense but workable. Decision to withdraw at such an important juncture was surprising and disappointing. Military advisors feel that decision was politically motivated in an effort to distance OSGAP from the shura and its aftermath. Concern over security was likely a convenient excuse. ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] has no intention of leaving Kabul. Some embassies are also reopening. OSGAP's credibility in Afghanistan as an honest broker has been severely diminished. Advise on planned future employment.²⁸

OSGAP was shut down in December 1992 and LCol Skidmore was repatriated from Kabul. Canada was by now heavily engaged in the Balkans and he was slated to lead 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment in Croatia. One of his company commanders was Major Jonathan Vance, who would later command Joint Task Force Afghanistan in 2009. Another player in Croatia was Major Pat Stogran, a UN Military Observer in Croatia at the time Skidmore and Vance were walking the line. Col Andy Leslie, eventually deputy commander of ISAF in Kabul in 2003, was chief of staff of the UN command in southern Croatia that commanded CANBAT 1 in 1995. Col Rick Hillier was a staff officer in the UN headquarters in Zagreb, Croatia. Another Balkans alumnus was Major Peter Devlin, who commanded an infantry company in Sarajevo in 1992 and would eventually lead the Kabul Multinational Brigade (KMNB). All of the Canadian battle group commanders who served in Afghanistan had previously served in Bosnia, Croatia, or Kosovo. Indeed, numerous senior Canadian military leaders who were in Afghanistan after the events of 2001 had experience with the UN in the Balkans, and many vowed that the limitations placed on Canadian troops by the UN would not be tolerated in any future conflict that Canada became engaged in. LCol Skidmore eventually returned to Kabul as a military advisor with UNAMA in 2008.

Pakistan's unwillingness to seriously support peace efforts in Afghanistan, coupled with a decreasing level of perseverance and adroitness exhibited by the United Nations personalities involved, played a key role in the deteriorating situation. This in turn was aggravated by the inability of multiple Mujahideen factions to work together toward a common aim. This was exploited by others, specifically the Wahhabist fundamentalists supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Taken together these were the proximate causes that ultimately led to Canada's deep involvement in Afghanistan for a decade after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. It was not simply a matter of a poorly executed post-Cold War endgame by the superpowers, though we cannot ignore the fact that it was a major contributing factor.

Backing Hekmatyar ultimately proved to be less and less useful to elements in Pakistan who sought to influence events in Afghanistan for their benefit. In time, they turned to a religious militia in Quetta employed by merchants in that city to ensure that the trade route from Quetta to Kandahar and the ring road in Afghanistan was clear of ‘banditry’ that supposedly was interfering with trade. The leader of that militia – the Taliban – was an obscure but charismatic figure named Mullah Omar. Between 1994 and 1996, Mullah Omar’s Taliban generated enough momentum to take control of most of Afghanistan. They co-opted a popular leader in Kandahar province named Mullah Naquibullah, who turned Kandahar City over to the Taliban when it appeared that another Mujahedeen leader, Gul Agha Sherzai, was losing his grip on power. Hekmatyar himself opposed the Taliban, then changed sides and joined them against Massoud and the moderate Mujahideen after the fight for Kabul. Kabul fell to the Taliban in August 1996 and the former President, Mohammad Najibullah, was taken from the UN compound, castrated and hung from a telephone pole. His mouth was stuffed full of money and his nostrils filled with cigarette butts. Massoud’s forces retreated to positions north of Kabul and a new war started, one that continued to rage throughout the 1990s.

The Saudi individual who had previously assisted the Pakistanis in trying to mediate between Massoud and Hekmatyar back in 1992 was drawn into an organization led by Abdullah Azzam, a man who harboured fantasies of a Muslim Foreign Legion to protect followers of Mohammad in conflict zones around the globe. When Azzam was assassinated, the Saudi man took over the remnants of the effort and reorganized it into Al Qaeda, “The Base.” Al Qaeda moved its training, communications, planning weapons experimentation, and production facilities to Taliban-controlled parts of Afghanistan, where their operatives laid the groundwork for the 9/11 and other attacks. On the road to New York and Washington, they assassinated Ahmad Shah Massoud on behalf of the Taliban on 10 September 2001. The man from Saudi Arabia was Osama bin Laden.

In the early 1990s, Afghanistan was not even on Canada’s political or military radar; it did not even have a Canadian Embassy. Pakistan was a Canadian foreign policy backwater. In those days, Canadian policy centred on being the UN peacekeeper par excellence and deploying on as many UN missions around the world as possible. Afghanistan was seen as an opportunity to engage in more UN peacekeeping. When that did not pan out, Canadian attention was directed elsewhere to places like Somalia (1992-1993), Croatia (1992-1995), Bosnia (1992-2004), and Cambodia (1992-1993), among other locations decolonizing from Communism in the post-Cold War system. Indeed, Canadian Army involvement in the Balkans from 1991 to 2004 was on par, in terms of size of forces, with what would be deployed to Afghanistan after 2002.

PROLOGUE

In the 1990s, the eyes of the world were on the violent drama unfolding in the remnants of the former Yugoslavia. The global media's satellite TV cameras and celebrity reporters focused on the streets of Mogadishu, the mounds of corpses in Rwanda, and the ruins of Sarajevo. None were in Kabul, let alone in Kandahar. No one in Canada had any inkling that Afghanistan would come to dominate events after 11 September 2001. After ten years of expeditionary operations, however, the Canadian Army was mature and experienced. It now had to adapt to the new circumstances.

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“IN THE BEGINNING....”:

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2001

The war did not start with formal national pronouncements as the First and Second World Wars had. Nor did the radar stations of the Distant Early Warning Line pick up nuclear bombers flying over the North Pole. There was no protracted tension between diplomats arguing over territorial boundaries in smoke-filled rooms. Canada's war in Afghanistan started in the 20 minutes in which 19 Saudi Arabian operatives from the Al Qaeda organization seized control of four airliners and used them as missiles to destroy the World Trade Center buildings in New York City and attack the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

The refugees from these attacks came in the form of passengers from hundreds of aircraft stranded in airspace over the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans and unable to enter the United States. Some wore Armani suits, others Levi's jeans; they were not lines of ragged people toting their personal goods in carts across the steppe. The passengers of one of the airliners were the first soldiers in this war, thrown into the front line of Business Class as they formed what amounted to an ad hoc citizen's militia and tried to retake the cockpit of United Flight 93. These events ultimately led to the first Canadian military deployment to Afghanistan in 2002.

After nearly 14 years of operations in the Balkans and 40 years in the Middle East, Canadians were conditioned to believe that Canada's army was strictly a peacekeeping force. It was therefore with some surprise that they saw the members of 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI), The Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) and the logisticians of the Forward Support Group (FSG) board transport aircraft at Edmonton International Airport for the long flight to Kandahar in February 2002.

How do we connect these events? There were two strategic processes, one Canadian and the other American, which led to Canada's commitment to the war in Afghanistan. Both converged to influence how the first Canadian Army combat force in decades would operate in the far reaches of the world, and the story of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group cannot be told without understanding what those influences were. Most importantly, the groundwork activities of that battle group, within that context, had longer-term implications for future Canadian forces when they deployed back to Kandahar in 2005 and operated in that environment for half a decade. No one could have foreseen the length and depth of Canada's commitment then, but the roots of it were laid once 3 PPCLI started operating in Kandahar.

Another important aspect of the 2002 deployment is that the Canadian battle group operated as a part of an American brigade combat team, not as an independent command. The actions of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group were thus intertwined with those of its parent American formation headquarters in ways later deployments were not. LCol Pat Stogran, the 3 PPCLI Battle Group commanding officer, likened the relationship between the Americans and the Canadians in Afghanistan to the First Special Service Force during the Second World War. Indeed, LCol Stogran used Devil's Brigade imagery, code words and analogies while he was in command. It is impossible to tell a purely Canadian story for this first deployment, as the Canadians and Americans worked shoulder to shoulder in ways they had not in decades.

The 3 PPCLI Battle Group had a series of particular tasks that directly contributed to the larger strategic objectives established by both Canada and the United States. Once those tasks are understood, it is easier to see what Canada accomplished in these early days. We do not have the space to delve into the exhaustive specifics of both the Canadian and American strategic decision-making processes. Consequently, this section will only provide enough insight into the decisions, policy, and strategy that formed the context of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group mission in order to understand why Canada made a subsequent series of commitments to the NATO-led ISAF mission in 2003–2004. The strategic decisions of 2001 and the actions of 3 PPCLI are inextricably linked to, and established the conditions for, subsequent decisions and operations.

After 11 September 2001

The Al Qaeda organization was formally identified as the main enemy within a week of the 9/11 attacks. On 19 September, a Pakistani delegation from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organization attempted to persuade the Taliban leadership to give up Osama bin Laden to the Americans, but that overture was rejected. Within six days, Taliban fundraising ramped up in several cities in Pakistan, with recruiting focused on religious students who volunteered to fight in Afghanistan.¹ There was, however, a split among the Kandahar Taliban. Three leaders in Kandahar City disagreed with Mullah Omar's decision to reject the Pakistani approach.² Indeed, the Canadian ambassador in Pakistan, Glyn Berry, was already warning his superiors in Ottawa that the Taliban might even collapse completely under pressure of an assault. A dangerous power vacuum might emerge in Kabul and thus Afghanistan, which in turn would affect the region.³

At the same time, a broad understanding that the war against Al Qaeda was global in scope and that Afghanistan was one of several possible fronts emerged among planners in the Pentagon and in Tampa, home of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) – the American headquarters responsible for the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.

Al Qaeda was believed to be operating in Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, as well as in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan, already engaged in a war with the Northern Alliance factions, was known to have provided Al Qaeda with sanctuary after the organization was forced to decamp from the Sudan in 1996. During the intervening years, Al Qaeda constructed training, communications and research bases, and the organization developed a parasitical relationship with the Taliban regime. The infiltration of this safe haven in Taliban-controlled areas and the destruction of Al Qaeda were given the highest priority as the American leadership made its plans at Camp David on 15-16 September 2001.⁴



Photo Credit: Author

Afghanistan was used as a base, communications, and training facility by the Al Qaeda organization. The 9/11 attacks were conceived and planned in Al Qaeda facilities in and around Kandahar City.

Several questions emerged at that meeting: should Al Qaeda be targeted exclusively, or should both the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda be attacked? Notably, there were concerns about the relationship between the two entities and the Hussein regime in Iraq. Should both Afghanistan and Iraq be engaged as part of a larger campaign? Those discussions established an important principle of the war: as one participant argued, “the chief purpose of U.S. military action was not punishing those behind 9/11 but attacking those who might launch the next 9/11.”⁵ There was a very real concern early on about the use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons against targets in North America, in addition to the possibility that attacks of the same magnitude as 9/11 could take place.⁶

Second, the Camp David meeting also established that the war against the Al Qaeda organization was going to be a “sustained, broad campaign” not limited to military action in Afghanistan. It would also involve the tracking and limitation of the enemy’s financial system and the attenuation of Al Qaeda’s global networks of operatives before they could attack again. Significantly, another purpose was to deter regimes sympathetic to Al Qaeda from capitalizing on the confused state of affairs that prevailed at the time. A key principle, one which would directly affect Canadian operations, was “to force the terrorists to play defense: if they had to run, hide, and devote their energies to evading our active pursuit, they would have less capability to plan and execute new, large scale offensive operations.”⁷

Consequently, American strategic guidance expressed on 19 September 2001 established the following targets:⁸

1. targets worldwide, such as [Osama bin Laden] Al Qaeda cells in regions outside Afghanistan and even outside the Middle East.... It will be important to indicate early on that our field of action is much wider than Afghanistan;
2. ground targets that provide opportunities to bring back intelligence that could help us run down terrorists’ networks; and
3. opportunities to demonstrate a capability or boldness that will give pause to terrorists and/or those who harbor terrorists and for them to exercise greater care, at greater cost or with much greater fear....

Item 2 deserves some elaboration. The Americans who conceptualized the campaign understood that information on Al Qaeda and affiliated organizations was lacking. Indeed, several investigations already underway for several years were tracking the dangerous activities of Abdul Qadeer “AQ” Khan, a Pakistani nuclear weapons designer, and the vast air movements’ network controlled by former Soviet air force officer Viktor Bout, among others. Men like Khan and Bout operated in the shadows, and the linkages between them, various non-state players like Al Qaeda, and established governments were of great concern when it came to the security of North America. Military operations, including those projected for Afghanistan, were in part calibrated to generate intelligence collection opportunities, not only to stop future attacks but also to identify the nature and extent of the global threat against North America.⁹ Again, this ultimately affected Canadian operations in Afghanistan.

Why did all this matter to Canada? There is no doubt that the United States is Canada's closest ally in cultural, military, and economic terms. The traumatic effects of the 9/11 attacks directly affected Canada on several levels, from those living in Gander, Newfoundland, who accepted an influx of airliners forced to land when North American airspace was closed, to the pilots of Air Command's CF-18s over the Yukon who could be asked to shoot down seized airliners, to workers in Ontario auto plants whose livelihood depended on an open trade relationship with the United States.¹⁰ Of note and sometimes overlooked, however, Canada is also a charter member of NATO. The principle of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty – an attack against one ally is an attack against all – was put into effect on 13 September 2001 with a variety of obligations.¹¹

Traditionally, Canada has deployed military forces overseas for forward security purposes. It is far better to deal with ideologies that pose threats to Canadian interests and values overseas than in the Western hemisphere. In essence, this uncodified but extant strategic doctrine has summoned Canada's soldiers overseas to the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War, UN and other peacekeeping missions in the Third World, NATO stabilization missions in the Balkans, and even gunboat diplomacy in the Caribbean. Canada's deployment as part of a coalition in Afghanistan was in keeping with this strategic tradition.¹²

The lack of large forces, strategic deployment capabilities and extensive command, control, communications, and intelligence capacities, however, meant that Canada could not tackle the task alone and in any event it had not done so in the past. Coalition operations were and remained the order of the day. It was a question of how exactly a Canadian contribution could be integrated into an American campaign plan while establishing clear Canadian objectives at the same time, thus protecting Canadian autonomy. That would take some time. Meanwhile, the Americans formulated and implemented the first stages of their campaign plan to deal with enemy forces in Afghanistan.

The general idea was that the Northern Alliance forces, with the support of special operations, selective use of airpower, and covert action by American and coalition forces, would remove the Taliban regime instead of using a major influx of coalition military forces to directly confront opposition forces.¹³ This course of action was selected because of the lack of available intelligence on the specifics of Al Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan and elsewhere. At the same time, it was designed to manage the post-war situation in order to avoid a destructive power vacuum similar to the one that had existed when the Mujahideen defeated the Communist forces in 1992-1993. It was recognized by American planners early on that close ties with Afghan forces were the key to accomplishing both objectives and that the coalition forces' footprint would be deliberately small to avoid antagonizing the population as the Soviets had in 1979-1989.¹⁴

Those concepts were debated during the remainder of September 2001 but by 27 September, the first covert CIA teams were sent in to liaise with the Northern Alliance and prepare the way for the arrival of coalition special operations forces.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the Canadian Army did what it usually did during a crisis: it examined a variety of options in anticipation of being asked by the Canadian government to deploy forces. On 21 September, the Chief of the Land Staff, LGen Mike Jeffrey, instructed the staff to prepare for a series of options to be briefed to the Army Council on 27 September. Under similar conditions, the Canadian Army would use an outline contingency plan called Operation SABRE, which was essentially an organizational and logistics template for a heavy combat brigade for overseas employment. That plan was not deemed useful for the situation at hand, so other templates for different types of units and formations were examined.¹⁶

The Army was capable of deploying one of three types of forces, the planners explained.¹⁷ The first option was the Intermediate Reaction Force (Land) (IRF(L)), which was essentially an infantry battalion with an artillery battery, a combat engineer squadron, a recce squadron and integral support, forming a battle group. The IRF(L) was similar to Canada's Cold War NATO ACE Mobile Force (Land) or UN Standby Force commitment. One battalion in Canada was at a higher state of readiness for global deployment, and that task rotated between the three light infantry battalions.

The second option was a Peace Support Brigade. This option was similar to the force deployed to Bosnia in 1995–1996 as part of the NATO-led Implementation Force. Optimized as a coalition command and control commitment, the Peace Support Brigade included a Canadian brigade headquarters, a Canadian battalion and recce squadron, and the ability to command two or more allied battalion-sized units. The formation was optimized as a stabilization force, not a combat formation.

The third option was a Main Contingency Force (MCF). Essentially, it was based on Operation SABRE but it could be a light infantry brigade or a heavy mechanized brigade, or two or three battalion-sized units under a brigade headquarters, depending on the circumstances.

Canada had, however, not yet committed Army forces to the campaign. For the time being, the options remained hypothetical and the staffs continued to refine them as events unfolded.

Into October

On 2 October 2001, an American intelligence official met secretly in Quetta, Pakistan, with the de facto second-in-command of the Taliban regime, Mullah Osmani, and presented him with an ultimatum: hand over Osama bin Laden or suffer the consequences.¹⁸ With no positive reply, the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM air campaign was launched on 7 October. After five days, all of the identified fixed targets had been destroyed by a combination of carrier-based aircraft, strategic bombers, and cruise missiles. The air campaign then shifted to targets of opportunity.¹⁹

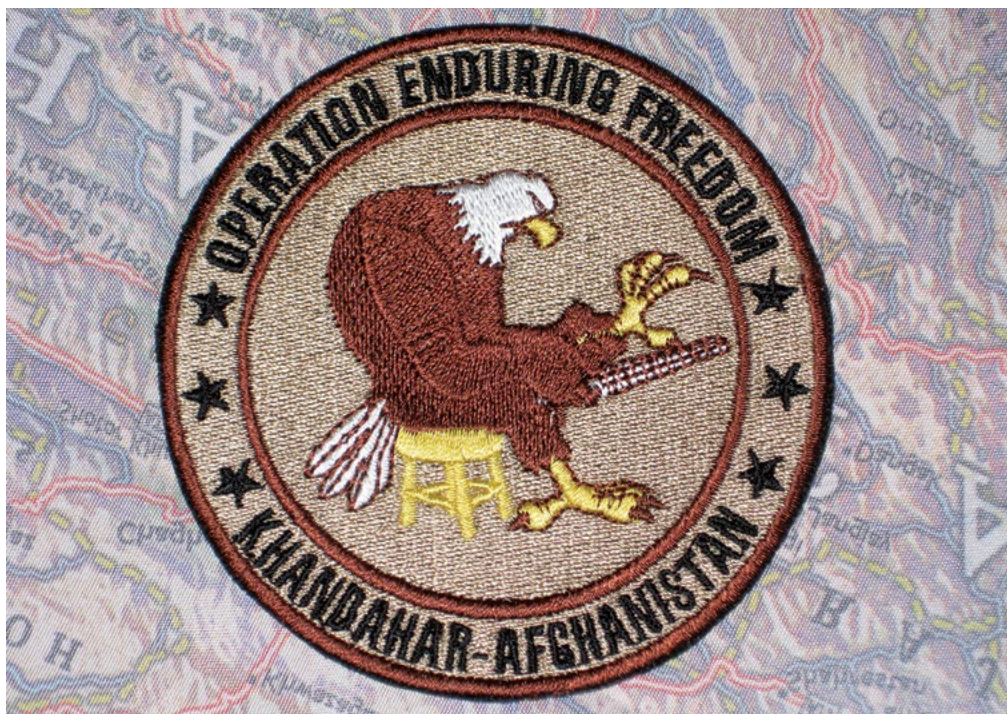


Photo Credit: Author

Two coalitions emerged to assist Afghanistan. The first was the American-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM which was formed to hunt down the Al Qaeda organization first on a regional, and later a global scale.

Between 9 and 11 October, a series of meetings in Washington laid the groundwork for what would eventually become the International Security Assistance Force or ISAF. One of the main concerns was the possible seizure of Kabul by the Fahim Khan faction of the Northern Alliance. The planners did not want a repeat of the events of 1992-1993, when victorious Mujahideen had sacked the city, started a civil war, and generated tribal resentments that still festered in the country; that was exactly what had led to the creation of the Taliban in the first place. It was possible that if the Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated Northern Alliance took control, the Pashtuns would become politically alienated, which in turn could fuel a continued civil war even without the presence of the Taliban. During those discussions, the possibility of “creating an international force to preserve the neutrality of the capital city” emerged.²⁰

This ‘international force’ idea would be developed in greater detail later on, in November. At the time, however, the American planners acknowledged that “We had influence, but not necessarily control.” One argument articulated in the Pentagon was that “Creating a stable, post-Taliban Afghanistan is desirable but not necessarily within the power of the U.S....

The U.S. should not allow concerns about stability to paralyze U.S. efforts to oust the Taliban leadership.” As more fidelity was applied, the idea that a non-U.S. international force should handle Kabul gained credence by mid-October.²¹ Following a substantial evolution of that idea, Canada eventually led the mission in 2004.

There were, however, serious concerns about “nation-building” in American circles, and that requires some explanation given the course of the campaign over the next five years. The idea that Afghans – and not bureaucrats from the UN, international organizations, or non-governmental aid organizations – should determine the future of Afghanistan was in circulation in Washington at the time, as was the desire to avoid developing aid dependency. Some American planners viewed top-heavy reconstruction efforts in the Balkans as a poor model and were concerned that the Afghans would view too much outside interference as meddling and react poorly to it, perhaps reverting back to the destructive civil war days of 1992–1996. Consequently, the principle of minimal aid and development intervention was established early on, with a greater emphasis on encouraging and enabling Afghan institutions.²² The effects of that approach would lead ultimately to the creation of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in late 2002 and early 2003 and Canada’s eventual command of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team in 2005.

Canadian Army planners, meanwhile, met throughout October and determined that the MCF (heavy) option was “not feasible within 90 days because of logistics constraints”²³ due to the lack of Canadian-owned strategic airlift and sealift – Canada did not yet have C-17 transports.²⁴ Each of the Army’s Areas was tasked with preparing for a different contingency related to Afghanistan, depending on what the government decided to send. Land Force Western Area was told to prepare an “augmented IRF(L) battalion” that would include a recce squadron and possibly a nuclear, biological, and chemical defence platoon.²⁵

Land Force Central Area, on the other hand, was to plan for a MCF (light) option which would include a brigade headquarters, the IRF(L) and a battalion group from Land Force Western Area, an armoured recce squadron, a light artillery battery, a combat engineer regiment, a service battalion, a field ambulance, and military police. Land Force Central Area was told to be prepared to use 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, a mechanized battalion, alongside the IRF(L) battalion.²⁶ The *Secteur du Québec de la Force terrestre* (Land Force Quebec Area) was instructed to prepare a brigade headquarters for a Peace Support Operation “as envisioned by the UN standby system.” They were also to be prepared to take Task Force Bosnia-Herzegovina (essentially a battle group) under command and prepare a second battalion and the IRF(L) battle group. The implications of pulling out of the Stabilization Force commitment in Bosnia was not discussed in detail at that time,²⁷ but there were concerns elsewhere that Al Qaeda elements in the Balkans might launch operations there and disrupt the fragile peace that Canada and its allies had painstakingly generated throughout the 1990s.²⁸

On 18 October, the Chief of the Land Staff issued Warning Order No. 1 instructing that preparations be made to “position the Army for possible taskings in support of Operation APOLLO.”²⁹ Between 18 and 24 October, there was considerable activity between Ottawa and the U.S. CENTCOM. The IRF(L) was now placed on a 48-hour notice to move on 24 October. Within seven days, this state of readiness applied only to the Vanguard Company Group, not the whole battalion.³⁰

There was irony in this situation. The IRF(L) battalion was based on 3 PPCLI, a light infantry battalion. The Canadian Army’s three light infantry battalions were originally post-Cold War ‘orphan’ units. When the drawdown took place in 1991-1992, one mechanized battalion from each infantry regiment was designated as a “10/90” or “Total Force” battalion with a reduced number of regulars and an increased number of Militia personnel. When the Airborne Regiment was disbanded after the Somalia affair, the soldiers from the three company-sized jump commandos were handed over to their parent regiments and incorporated into the Total Force battalions, which were re-designated as light infantry battalions. Initially, they had no real role and even less equipment available, but over time, industrious battalion commanding officers turned these orphan units around and started to craft light infantry doctrine, including doctrine for airmobile operations.

The Chief of the Land Staff, however, was under some financial constraint and his staff had been preparing to abolish the light infantry battalions, mechanize all units with the new infantry fighting vehicle, the LAV III, and remove equipment such as tanks and self-propelled guns from the Canadian Army’s order of battle. Only after 9/11 did it suddenly become apparent that the most suitable organization available for near-immediate deployment was 3 PPCLI, the light infantry battalion occupying the IRF(L) rotation that fall.

Meanwhile, the CENTCOM concept of operations for ground forces in Afghanistan was implemented. American units secured an outer ring of bases in adjacent countries: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. The CIA Special Activities Division, code-named JAWBREAKER, liaised with anti-Taliban commanders inside Afghanistan, and facilitated the entry of Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) K-Bar and Dagger to work with the Northern Alliance forces. The SOTFs improved the Afghans’ ability to engage the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda forces. In theory, both activities would generate intelligence on Al Qaeda leadership locations and their Afghanistan-based activities. TF 11, based around the highly classified Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) special mission units, would then sortie out on direct action missions to kill or capture Al Qaeda leadership and conduct sensitive site exploitation missions to gather strategic intelligence on Al Qaeda’s global activities so that other 9/11-like plots could be targeted and stopped.³¹



Photo Credit: Author

The Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan supported the Northern Alliance in the takedown of the Taliban regime in 2001-2002. Canada contributed forces to this organization and supported its activities by protecting its bases at Kandahar Air Field.

The Ides of November

By November 2001, Canada had established a robust planning and coordination element at the CENTCOM HQ called Joint Task Force South West Asia. None of the planners in Tampa or Ottawa anticipated the rapid collapse of the Taliban regime on several fronts within a three-week period, however. With the assistance of U.S. Special Forces, CIA, and American air support, Northern Alliance commander Abdul Rashid Dostum seized Mazar-e Sharif by 5 November and his rival Ismael Khan took Herat on 11 November. The advance on Kabul started on 13-14 November as Northern Alliance forces under Fahim Khan broke south down the Shomali Plain, and a secondary front under Khan seized the city of Jalalabad on 14 November. Dostum and Khan then squeezed the city of Konduz in the north; it fell between 24 and 30 November.

During that time, there was some discussion in Ottawa about sending CF-18s as part of the air campaign. One option was to base these aircraft out of Kulyab in Tajikistan. Exploratory discussions suggested that the Army should provide a protective element, but then the idea of basing the IRF(L) at Kulyab gained traction as well. When Mazar-e Sharif fell, the CENTCOM Commander, General Tommy Franks, became interested in

using a Canadian battle group operating from Kulyab as part of the northern campaign. General Franks asked Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Greg Madison to plan a Canadian land forces contribution to Afghanistan at this point or in the spring.³²

Following the accelerated collapse of Taliban resistance at Mazar-e Sharif, CENTCOM formally requested that the coalition partners consider providing forces for a stabilization operation there. General Franks was insistent that Mazar-e Sharif was an opportunity, a “test of coalition ability to get it together in real time.” The IRF(L) battle group was a prime candidate, and CENTCOM asked for it to be ready by 1 December if possible. CENTCOM planners, caught up in the wildly accelerated timelines, told the Canadian planners that they had to be prepared to move quickly “if CF Land Forces are to play a significant part in the land campaign.” Canadian planners shifted focus to look at placing CF-18 strike aircraft and the IRF(L) at Mazar-e Sharif or in Herat.³³

On 13 November 2001, however, this all ground to a halt. First, Rashid Dostum, decided he did not want a large coalition footprint in Mazar-e Sharif and discouraged CENTCOM from sending forces. Second, French planners in Tampa, working with the Jordanians, had come up with a contingency plan to deploy their forces to Mazar-e Sharif before the Canadian planners could. Third, it looked as if Fahim Khan’s Northern Alliance forces were about to move on Kabul. That was potentially destabilizing; the destructive events of 1992-1993 might be repeated, and in addition, an ethnic conflict might be triggered between the Tajik and Uzbek Northern Alliance forces on one side and the Pashtun-dominated anti-Taliban forces on the other. Planning in CENTCOM shifted to the potential insertion of a British brigade-sized force into Bagram Air Field with the intention of moving it into Kabul to stabilize the situation.³⁴

Discussions then started between London and Ottawa: could the IRF(L) become part of the British force? The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence were briefed on that option on 14 November, and the Prime Minister agreed to permit the deployment of Canadian land forces to Afghanistan. CENTCOM then formally requested a Canadian light infantry battalion for operations in Afghanistan.³⁵

The Prime Minister agreed that several Canadian Forces objectives should be met in conjunction with this commitment. That guidance ultimately had long-term effects on Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan and provided justification for later deployments. There were six objectives:³⁶

1. Eliminate the Al Qaeda organization as a continuing terrorist threat.
2. Take appropriate military action to compel the Taliban to cease all support to, harbouring of, and cooperation with Al Qaeda.

3. Isolate the Taliban regime from all international support.
4. Bring Osama bin Laden and the leaders of the Al Qaeda organization to justice.
5. Address the immediate humanitarian needs of Afghans [sic] in the region, ensuring where possible [that] it complements existing humanitarian operations.
6. Assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

In effect, this became the Army's brief for Operation APOLLO and subsequent deployments to Afghanistan. Starting in 2001, everything the Canadian Army did in Afghanistan fit into this schema, in one way or another.

Just after the Canadian government announced that Canada would contribute land forces to the campaign, the British Bagram deployment ground to a halt. On 15 November, six blacked-out Royal Air Force C-130 transports loaded with Special Boat Service and Special Air Service personnel landed at Bagram Air Field, which resulted in a Mexican standoff with Fahim Khan's forces. Like Dostum in Mazar-e Sharif, Khan did not want excessive coalition scrutiny of his activities in and around Kabul.³⁷ While Canadian planners were working out the details of the Bagram deployment with their coalition counterparts, they were told that such a deployment was now "problematic" given the behaviour of the Northern Alliance forces. The British-led option was turned off on 19 November, but the possibility of deploying a Canadian infantry company with an American-led Bagram force remained alive – for the time being.³⁸

The Emergence of the International Security Assistance Force

On 18 November 2001, CENTCOM planners realized that operations in Afghanistan could no longer be separated into Shaping, Decisive, and Stability operations; they were starting to blend. Bagram Air Field, for example, was a 'lily pad' for launching special operations forces direct action operations against Al Qaeda, but it also served as a base for a stabilization force that would ensure that ethnic conflict did not break out in the post-Taliban period. The idea that a 'coalition of the willing' separate from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM should handle the stabilization tasks separate from OEF gained traction in policy and planning circles, and that such a force should arrive within 60 days after the end of hostilities or after OEF extracted from Afghanistan. Somalia was currently in the sights of the CENTCOM planners, who wanted to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven. Most importantly, CENTCOM planners understood that the Afghans had to be involved in the

stabilization process, and that they were unlikely to accept a large influx of foreign troops. At that point, the possibility of deploying an American division with a corps headquarters had been under consideration, but now it was off the table.³⁹

The idea remained unrefined for the time being, but the concept of a UN or other regional coalition handling the Phase IV objectives, i.e., stabilizing the country, was now also in play in Bonn, Germany.⁴⁰ Over at the UN, Lakhdar Brahimi presented a plan to rebuild Afghanistan, and by 14 November the UN Security Council had endorsed a plan to meet with Afghan power brokers and the international community to discuss post-war reconstruction. With the support of the United States, UN representatives flew to Kabul to talk to the Northern Alliance leadership and others. After a substantial amount of diplomacy, all of the non-Taliban factions agreed to meet in Bonn, Germany.

The details are discussed elsewhere,⁴¹ but the basic plan was to establish an Afghan Interim Administration led by Afghans, garner international support and thus legitimacy for it, and stave off destructive factional violence between the victors. One issue in the Bonn discussions revolved around the sort of security architecture that should be created for this governance effort. From 25 November to 5 December, the factions and other interested parties hammered out a compromise. The UN would not deploy resources to assist Afghanistan in the absence of a non-U.S. commanded security force. The Northern Alliance faction – called the United Front in the talks – viewed the presence of a robust UN-led force in the country as inimical to its consolidation of power.

The result was the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force. Deliberately kept small by the Afghans so that it could not challenge the Northern Alliance for control of Kabul, ISAF was supposed to consist of 1 500 combat soldiers and 3 000 support personnel. ISAF's initial task was to ensure protection of international community and transitional administration personnel inside Kabul and at the vital Kabul International Airport. This was a far cry from what ISAF would evolve into over the next five years.⁴² At the same time, the Bonn Agreement established a rudimentary strategy for post-Taliban Afghanistan, informally dubbed the 'Bonn Pillars.' (See Figure 1-1)

Establishing legitimacy by cooperative engagement in formulating a national government was one thing. But the reality was that the monopoly of coercive force needed to be in the hands of a government, hopefully one that was elected, and opponents to that process had to be neutralized. It was understood that the damage to Afghanistan's institutions was as catastrophic as it was dramatic, so several nations agreed to take the lead in the five key areas and assist the emergent Afghan administration in the process.⁴³ As we will see, this task proved to be overwhelming for the participants and had long-term effects.



Photo Credit: Author

The second coalition was the International Security Assistance Force, which emerged from the 2001 Bonn Agreement and was limited in scope to Kabul and environs. ISAF was subsequently 'NATO-ized' in 2003 to expand throughout the country.

Indeed, there were some concerns about what the relationship between Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and ISAF was supposed to be. Paul Wolfowitz from the Pentagon told Canadian planners that ISAF was not to interfere in any way with ENDURING FREEDOM operations or trump any of its campaign objectives. It was clear that the mission of destroying Al Qaeda and its Afghan infrastructure had absolute priority, not the activities of the emergent Afghan Interim Administration or its ISAF protection force. General Franks was concerned about coordination and de-confliction, so he established a planning team to address those issues. Canada was invited to join.⁴⁴

An assessment of the situation in Afghanistan concluded that the Taliban's political influence, as a regime at least, would be eliminated within three months and that Al Qaeda's capabilities were seriously degraded. Pockets of both Taliban and Al Qaeda remained and had to be eliminated. There had been significant sensitive site exploitation; detailed analysis of Al Qaeda training, command, and other sites for strategic intelligence was underway but most of the top enemy leaders remained at large.



Photo Credit: Author

The Kabul Multinational Brigade was ISAF's main operational arm in Kabul in 2003-2005.

CENTCOM's mission shifted, at least on paper. The coalition was to⁴⁵

1. destroy the Al Qaeda organization;
2. provide a stable environment for the Afghan Interim Administration;
3. facilitate humanitarian assistance; and
4. conduct counter-terrorism operations.

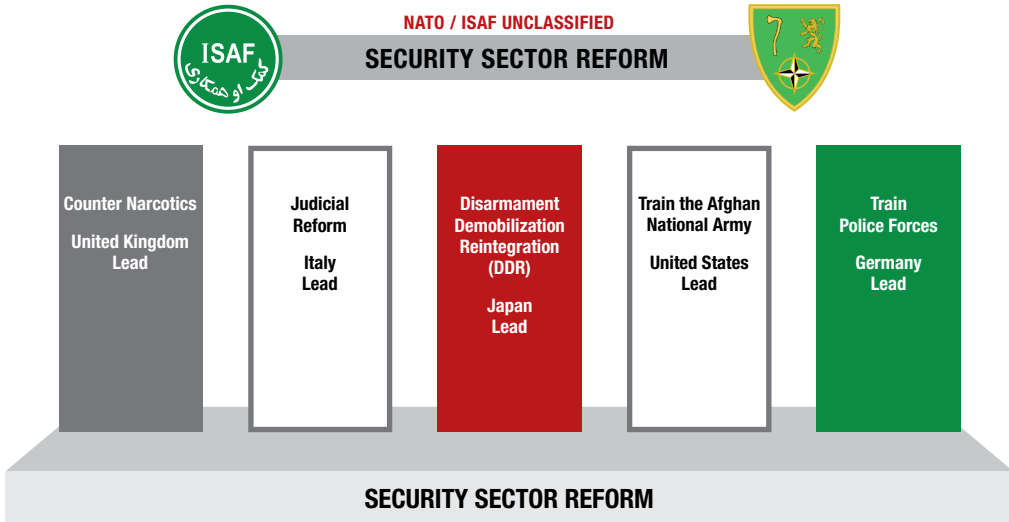


Figure 1-1: The Bonn Pillars

The new campaign objectives were to⁴⁶

1. eliminate the threat of terrorist groups in Afghanistan;
2. eliminate or capture Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership;
3. set conditions so that terrorism [would] not be able to take root in Afghanistan again;
4. support the emerging government;
5. set conditions for decisive operations throughout CENTCOM area of operations;
6. prevent instability; and
7. be prepared to transition to multinational forces.

However, around mid-December, Canadian planners and their Commonwealth counterparts at CENTCOM started to express concerns. The consensus among the representatives was that CENTCOM was too focused on Phase III and “doesn’t have a coherent plan that moves beyond military operations.”⁴⁷ Another observer noted, “[the CENTCOM Commander in Chief] is totally focused on combat operations and seems to regard ISAF as an irritant rather than as an opportunity to pursue his Phase IV campaign objectives.”⁴⁸ The idea that ISAF could be more than a stability force for the capital appears to have its origins in these informal discussions. However, there was explicit guidance from President Bush: “ISAF, in whatever form, is not to interfere with the conduct of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.”⁴⁹ There were two options tabled at that time: ISAF could be limited in its activities by a UN Security Council resolution, or it could be made a subordinate command of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The first option was selected.

The United Kingdom accepted lead-nation status for ISAF in early December and set about trying to find contributor nations. At that point, a faction within the Department of Foreign Affairs wanted Canada to commit the IRF(L) to ISAF, in the mistaken belief that ISAF was a UN ‘peacekeeping’ mission, unlike the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM ‘warfighting’ mission. At the same time, British planners were not interested in a Canadian battalion but queried Canada about sending an engineer squadron. After discussion in Ottawa, committing to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM with a battalion of combat troops was deemed more important than sending a small engineer squadron to help others escort diplomats around Kabul. Canada would not contribute to ISAF – yet.⁵⁰

Tora Bora

The Battle of Tora Bora in December 2001 also had ramifications for later Canadian operations in Afghanistan. The collapse of the Taliban regime and a retreat southward from Kabul resulted in the flow of Al Qaeda forces into a triangle between Khost, Gardez, and Kabul. Intelligence and targeting assets identified the Tora Bora area, an extremely mountainous and rugged region, as a likely sanctuary or part of a ‘rat line’ for leadership targets headed to Pakistan. CIA and U.S. Special Forces were covertly inserted into the mountains and identified a significant number of targets, which were engaged with joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs) bombs and AC-130 gunships as they presented themselves throughout early to mid-December. Signals intelligence determined that there was a high probability that Osama bin Laden and his entourage were located somewhere in the Tora Bora mountains. Every cave that could be identified was engaged with a variety of deep penetration bombs. Afghan forces, working with U.S. Special Forces and CIA teams, attempted to block off exit routes out of the mountains in order to catch the Al Qaeda leadership.

Despite the generation of significant enemy casualties, none of the leadership targets was caught. Although limited sensitive site exploitation operations were conducted in Tora Bora in January 2002 by U.S. Special Forces, the verdict was not in and the question remained as to where bin Laden and his second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri were. Had he been killed during Tora Bora? If they had escaped, where did they escape to? And how?⁵¹

The fallout from Tora Bora raised the question of how much trust should be placed in the sometimes unreliable Afghan groups working with special operations forces. Allegations of Al Qaeda bribing some tribal militias to let them get away were rampant in the media. There was significant criticism regarding the lack of conventional ground forces and speculation as to what might have happened at Tora Bora had a Ranger battalion or the 10th Mountain Division battalion based at Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan been deployed to the fight.⁵² The criticism had its effect and, in some ways, contributed to how the Canadian battle group would be employed in Afghanistan once it got on the ground.

The War in the South

The nature of the war in southern Afghanistan differed greatly from the war in the north. There was no organized, established conventional opposition to the Taliban regime, nor was there a counterpart to the Northern Alliance to support. A coalition had to be built from scratch – a classic special forces A team mission. Operational detachment Alphas (ODAs) were inserted into the region and, working with CIA assets, identified tribal groups that had grievances against the Taliban. These groups were approached, relationships were built, and support was brought in. The focal point of this effort tended to be tribal groups from the Durrani confederation of the Pashtuns, who opposed the Ghilzai-dominated Taliban. Eventually, Hamid Karzai and other tribal leaders were inserted to stimulate rebellion against the regime, particularly in Oruzgan province.⁵³

In late October, U.S. Army Rangers parachuted in and raided an airfield in Helmand province, code-named RHINO. This facility was identified as part of a potential ‘rat line’ out of Afghanistan to the Gulf states which Al Qaeda’s leadership might use. The Taliban protection element was wiped out, and the message was sent that Operation ENDURING FREEDOM was watching. There were a number of other raids conducted by JSOC in and around Kandahar at that time, including a daring but inconclusive raid into Mullah Omar’s compound at Ghecko inside Kandahar City on 19 October.⁵⁴

More and larger raids were planned using TF 58, a U.S. Navy-Marine Corps task force led by Marines Corps Brigadier General James Mattis. With the Taliban and Al Qaeda’s collapse in the north, CENTCOM was determined to insert TF 58 into southern Afghanistan to establish a forward operating base. The idea was to interdict enemy movement into and out of the south. Objective RHINO was re-acquired this time by TF 58, which flew in

by helicopter from three bases in Pakistan. RHINO functioned as a forward operating base for JSOC, TF KBar, TF 64 (the Australian SAS Regiment) and British SAS forces. The special operations forces sortied from RHINO and conducted direct action and sensitive site exploitation in Helmand, Oruzgan, and Kandahar provinces in late November and throughout December 2001. TF 58 also sortied out with LAV-25s and conducted ambushes along Highway 1 in Kandahar province.⁵⁵

Working with several Durrani confederation clans, U.S. Special Forces established a base area near Taktah Pol between Spin Boldak and Kandahar City. These forces then advanced up Highway 4, driving Al Qaeda and Taliban forces before them.⁵⁶ With TF 58 to the west of Kandahar City, and with friendly elements now operating within the city, the situation in the south was looking untenable for the enemy. Enemy forces retreating from Kabul in mid-December halted in the Ghazni, Paktika, and Khost areas instead of heading toward Kandahar. This, in part, established the conditions for the Tora Bora operations discussed earlier.

On 7 December 2001, a number of tribal leaders in Kandahar City defected to the coalition and turned the city over to Afghan and coalition forces. The U.S. Marines decamped from FOB RHINO and moved to take Kandahar Air Field (KAF) in conjunction with special forces and tribal forces. CENTCOM then advised Canada on 18 December that a light infantry battalion might be needed to secure KAF. The next day, Canadian commanders were authorized to plan for that mission. The formal request for forces arrived on 5 January 2002 and the decision to send the 3 PPCLI Battle Group was announced by the Canadian government on 7 January.⁵⁷

Though disrupted and on the run, the enemy was still dangerous. The takedown of the Taliban regime had to be consolidated, and sensitive site exploitation missions still had to be conducted to determine the extent of Al Qaeda's global operations. There were indications that natural gas supplies in North America and Europe would be attacked by Al Qaeda cells if either Osama bin Laden or Mullah Omar were captured. There was data collected suggesting plans for mass casualty-generating attacks on American transit systems. In Afghanistan, 48 sites suspected of involvement in Al Qaeda's attempts to create chemical, biological, or radiological weapons were identified and had yet to be exploited for information. Evidence of a special type of shoe bomb for targeting passenger aircraft was found. There was credible intelligence that an Al Qaeda group was scheduled to attack Heathrow airport in the United Kingdom. Finally, terrorist attacks in India were assessed as part of a plan to convince Pakistan to shift forces, covering the border with Afghanistan, to offset a possible Indian response and thus assist with the escape of Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership.⁵⁸

KAF was the critical facility in southern Afghanistan. It was the logistics hub of the coalition effort, and it had the only facilities capable of supporting sustained aerial, airmobile, and special operations. In addition to dealing with Al Qaeda, a new mission came down from CENTCOM on 28 December 2001: “Reduce the capability of the Taliban to reconstitute itself as a threat to the Afghan Interim Administration.”⁵⁹ Special operations forces shifted to hunting Mullah Omar and his colleagues north of Kandahar City and in adjacent Oruzgan province. And that is when the 3 PPCLI Battle Group entered the war.

ENDNOTES

1. Joint Task Force Southwest Asia (JTFSWA) ASSESSREP, (19 September 2001).
2. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP, (25 September 2001).
3. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP, (28 September 2001).
4. George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), pp. 177, 207-208.
5. Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 49.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
9. Both Tenet and Feith discuss this in their works but omit the specifics. Other works, particularly Douglas Farah and Stephen Braun’s *Merchant of Death: Money, Guns, Planes, and the Man Who Makes War Possible* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2007); Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Insecurity, and the Rise and Fall of the AQ Khan Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) all provide insight into the problem confronting the administration at this time.
10. See Jim Defede, *The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).
11. As Lieutenant General Michael DeLong, USMC reminds us in *Inside CENTCOM: The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing 2004), p. 27.
12. See Sean M. Maloney, “Helpful Fixer or Hired Gun? Why Canada Goes Overseas,” *Policy Options*, January 2001, pp. 59-65; Sean M. Maloney and Douglas L. Bland, *Campaigns for International Security* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p. 22.
13. Tommy Franks (with Malcolm McConnell), *American Soldier* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), pp. 269-271.
14. Feith, *War and Decision*, pp. 75-77.
15. As discussed in detail in Gary Schroen, *First In: An Insider’s Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005) and Gary Berntsen, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

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16. Message DLFR to dl, "Warning Order 01-Potential Land Force Contribution to the War on Terrorism" (18 October 2001).
17. Ibid. The identification of the three types of forces is from Warning Order 01. The descriptions are the author's.
18. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, p. 182.
19. DeLong, *Inside CENTCOM*, pp. 38-39.
20. Feith, *War and Decision*, pp. 97-98.
21. Ibid., p. 101.
22. Ibid., pp. 101-102.
23. Message DLFR to dl, "Warning Order 01-Potential Land Force Contribution to the War on Terrorism" (18 October 2001).
24. Handwritten notes by LCol Larry Zaporzan, "Courses of Action" (n/d). Contextual note: there was a scramble to rent the limited number of contract airlifters in the fall of 2001, so much so that Viktor Bout's air transport company(ies) that flew in support of both the Northern Alliance and the Taliban were being contracted by coalition forces. See Farah and Braun's *Merchant of Death*, Ch.11.
25. Message DLFR to dl, "Warning Order 01-Potential Land Force Contribution to the War on Terrorism" (18 October 2001).
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. JTFSWA ASSESSREP (26 October 2001).
29. DLFR to dl, "LF Contribution to Op APOLLO-Concept of Operations" (29 November 2001).
30. Ibid.
31. Sean M. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), pp. 48-50.
32. "Commander Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia Operation APOLLO Rotation Zero Report-Op APOLLO Chronology" (19 April 2002).
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. CDS and DM to PM, "Canadian Forces' Objectives Related to Combating the Threat of Terrorism" (20 November 2001).
37. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom*, p. 51.
38. "Commander Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia Operation APOLLO Rotation Zero Report-Op APOLLO Chronology" (19 April 2002).
39. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (18 November 2001).
40. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (26 November 2001).
41. The only examination of the origins of ISAF thus far is Sean M. Maloney, "ISAF: Origins of a Stabilization Force," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol 4 No 2.

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42. Ibid.
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44. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (4 December 2001); (S) SSS 10 G 3 3350-20 v. 3 CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (5 December 2001).
45. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (13 December 2001).
46. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (13 December 2001).
47. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (13 December 2001).
48. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (14 December 2001).
49. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (17 December 2001).
50. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom*, pp. 57-58.
51. DeLong, *Inside CENTCOM*, pp. 54-56; Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*, Ch. 16-19.
52. See Philip Smucker, *Al Qaeda's Great Escape* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2004) and particularly Berntsen's *Jawbreaker*.
53. Feith, *War and Decision*, p. 120; Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, pp. 219-220.
54. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom*, p. 48.
55. "Unclassified Documents from Marine Task Force 58's Operations in Afghanistan," *Strategy Page* (2002).
56. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom*, pp. 202-204.
57. "Commander Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia Operation APOLLO Rotation Zero Report-Op APOLLO Chronology" (19 April 2002).
58. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (4 November 2001); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (6 November 2001); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (11 December 2001); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (12 December 2001); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (1 January 2002).
59. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (28 December 2001).

OPERATION APOLLO, FEBRUARY-JULY 2002:

PRELIMINARIES

The decision by the Canadian government to deploy the 3 PPCLI Battle Group led to a flurry of activity from Ottawa, to Tampa, and Edmonton. The novelty of sending a Canadian army contingent to fight was not lost on the Canadian people and the media. All the while, the soldiers and their families had lived a precarious existence for nearly two months as options were weighed and the war on the ground in Afghanistan progressed.

In February 2002, the Operation APOLLO force was finalized as a battalion headquarters; two light infantry companies (with a third company from 2nd Battalion PPCLI added in March 2002); a direct fire support company (snipers, machine guns, TOW missile launchers); half of a recce squadron from The Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) equipped with Coyote surveillance vehicles; a reinforced combat engineer troop from 12 Field Squadron, 1 Combat Engineer Regiment; a mortar platoon manned by 1 Royal Canadian Horse Artillery; and a Forward Support Group to handle logistics, which itself consisted of 77 people drawn from nearly 15 units across Canada. Additionally, there was a signals platoon, which included a National Command, Control, and Information System Light Detachment for strategic communications,¹ and a Mobile Electronic Warfare Team section from 2 Electronic Warfare Squadron. Overall, the 3 PPCLI Battle Group consisted of 1 000 personnel.²

Because of the lack of Canadian strategic airlift, U.S. Air Force C-5B Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster III transports were used to move the battle group from Edmonton to Frankfurt am Main in Germany, to great public fanfare. C-17s equipped with defensive systems took over from there to Afghanistan.

LCol Pat Stogran and his recce party reached Kandahar on 14 January 2002. Almost every participant in the early days of Operation APOLLO was greeted with a similar scene on arrival: the C-17 would fly in at night, conduct a 'corkscrew' manoeuvre over KAF to disrupt any potential enemy anti-aircraft systems and then land at the blacked-out facility. The trashed international terminal was lit only by the glow of burning 50-gallon drums, where heavily armed, toque-wearing, dirty U.S. Marines were hunched over the flames warming their hands. It was a scene right out of a post-apocalyptic movie. When the main body arrived on 3 February, they were taken at night to a piece of bare ground and told to establish camp. There were initially no defensive works; sandbags and defensive stores were borrowed from the New Zealand SAS and the troops dug in using their entrenching tools and whatever else they could get their hands on.



The lack of Canadian strategic airlift resulted in dependence on U.S. Air Force C-5B and C-17 transports to deploy the Canadian battlegroup from Edmonton to Kandahar Air Field. It took over five years, or nearly the duration of the Second World War, to correct this deficiency.

The 3 PPCLI Battle Group operated as part of an American brigade: the 187 Brigade Combat Team (187 BCT) from the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), also known as TF Rakkasan.³ 187 BCT was supposed to have three battalions rotating between security duties at KAF, security duties at a base in Pakistan, and force projection. Based at Kandahar, 187 BCT consisted of an engineer battalion, a logistics task force (the 626th Forward Support Battalion or FSB), an AH-64 Apache attack helicopter unit, and a transport helicopter unit equipped with CH-47 Chinook and UH-60 Blackhawks. The reality was that TF Rakkasan was short a battalion and that was where the 3 PPCLI Battle Group came into play: it became the third battalion in the brigade.⁴

LCol Stogran's Canadian chain of command went all the way back to Tampa, Florida, to Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia, and then to Ottawa, while 3 PPCLI Battle Group was under TF Rakkasan's operational control in Afghanistan. However, there were additional strictures on the forward-deployed force. The Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, VAdm Greg Maddison, had already established a restrictive regime over operations in Afghanistan involving Canadian Special Operations Forces whereby any direct action operation or the cutting of any forces to allied organizations had to be approved on a case-by-case basis by the DCDS back in Ottawa. These restrictions were fallout from the 1993 Somalia affair and the subsequent inquiry into the activities of the Canadian Airborne Regiment.⁵



Photo Credit: DND ISD02-9506

LCol Pat Stogran, the Commanding Officer of 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and Canadian contingent commander in Kandahar, briefs his staff.

The Canadian Forces could not fail again as it had in Somalia. Therefore, the CDS and the DCDS deemed that tighter controls were necessary to reduce political liability. Those controls were applied to LCol Stogran and 3 PPCLI, which was not a direct-action oriented SOF organization – and arguably did not need that level of intimate control from Ottawa. Those decisions served to constrain 3 PPCLI in its activities and that was something the Americans were not used to.⁶ The restrictive regime established in 2001 remained in place well into 2004 during Operation ATHENA.

Kandahar Air Field: ENDURING FREEDOM's Vital Ground

KAF was vital ground not only in the war in Afghanistan but also in the larger conflict against Al Qaeda. This was critical context for the 3 PPCLI Battle Group's employment; it was not a matter of 'just' protecting an airfield. KAF, with its 10 000-foot runway, was one of a network of facilities that was critical in so many ways to the success of the war. In 2002, there were only three such facilities in coalition hands in Afghanistan: Bagram Air Field in the north; the smaller airfield at Khost; and Kandahar in the south. There were peripheral air bases in the adjacent countries that fed Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces stationed inside Afghanistan. Everything that was needed to support the war against

the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda had to come in by air through this base network. The importance of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group's role in force protection at KAF tends to be underplayed because, comparatively, it was an unglamorous task. What tends to be forgotten is that the loss of the airfield or even its disruption would have been catastrophic and set back the coalition effort months, if not years.

Bagram, Kandahar, and Khost were 'launch pads' for various types of operations in that war. For the most part, those operations were conducted by special operations forces and, later, by conventional light infantry. KAF was situated next to Kandahar City, the largest city in southern Afghanistan and an age-old major transportation and trading hub for the Central Asia region, not just the country. Kandahar was the first city the Taliban seized in its march to power in the late 1990s and, thus, it also had psychological value. Pre-invasion Al Qaeda activity in Afghanistan was clustered in Jalalabad, Kabul, Khost, and Kandahar, with over 50 sites dedicated to training, research and development, and command and control. The seizure of KAF was, to put it bluntly, incredibly disruptive to both Taliban and Al Qaeda operations.

KAF afforded various special operations units a secure forward base. Previously, they had had to operate from Jacobabad in Pakistan; Karshi-Khanabad or 'K2' in Uzbekistan; Manas in Kyrgyzstan; or from ships in the Arabian Sea, all at a distance from Kandahar. Now the SOF were closer to their targets and thus could react more quickly. There was less exposure to air defence systems 'on the ingress' as flight times were shorter. Special operations personnel could rest and train in secure facilities, again closer to the action. Their logistics system was protected. All in all, having access to a protected KAF permitted a dramatically increased tempo of operations in the south.

By then, there were several aspects of the war superimposed on each other. First, there was the takedown of the Taliban regime, the 'shield' that protected the Al Qaeda forces and infrastructure in Afghanistan. Second, there was the direct engagement of Al Qaeda units and formations in Afghanistan that supported the Taliban. Third, there was the Al Qaeda infrastructure and leadership itself. Fourth, there was the need to engage the Al Qaeda networks conducting terrorism around the globe and their financial, logistics and recruiting elements.

The forces required to engage those four targets varied in type and number. As we have seen, U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas worked closely with anti-Taliban groups in Afghanistan to overthrow the regime. CIA (also known as the 'Other Government Agency' or OGA) teams worked with the same groups to develop strategic intelligence on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan for targeting purposes. Other special operations forces, dubbed 'Other Coalition Forces,' included the JSOC, the CIA's Special Activities Division, and several unnamed, numbered organizations. The 'Other Coalition Forces'

were poised to act on information provided by the OGA. As the war broadened out, special operations forces from several NATO countries joined the fight, some working alongside the American special operations forces.

By the time 3 PPCLI arrived in Kandahar, the roll call of specialized activities was even longer. Special operations forces airlift was handled by the 3rd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (3-160 SOAR), which deployed a proportion of its ten MH-60 and eight MH-47D helicopters to the airfield to support TF K-Bar. TF K-Bar consisted of a U.S. Navy SEAL unit; 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) (SFGA); and SOF from Canada, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, and Germany. There was also TF-64, the Australian SAS Regiment unit that deployed back in 2001.⁷

The 12-man ODAs from 3rd Battalion, 3rd SFGA, worked closely with the anti-Taliban tribal elements in Kandahar and adjacent provinces. Its forward operating base was at KAF. These were the ‘proxy’ forces that destabilized and challenged the Taliban in the south back in 2001. The European TF K-Bar units conducted mostly strategic and special reconnaissance missions, with 3-160 SOAR performing the insertions. The SEALs and Canadians generally handled direct action and sensitive site exploitation missions.⁸

The JSOC contingent was called TF Green and included a squadron from the Combat Applications Group, better known to the public as Delta Force. The Naval Development Group, better known as SEAL team SIX, was TF Blue. There was also the Advanced Force Operations unit and Grey Fox, also known as the Intelligence Support Activity. Ranger teams provided protective elements (TF Red). CIA Special Activities Division and its intelligence apparatus were part of TF-5; elements from 2nd Battalion, 160th SOAR, supported those forces. At times, British SAS and SBS squadrons worked alongside TF-5 elements. TF-5 was mostly based out of Bagram; if it looked like a high value leadership target might be operating in the south, a ‘package’ drawn from those elements could be staged out of Kandahar.⁹

In essence, a lot of the machinery used to conduct the war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and thus the basis for the larger global operations against the organization, was located at KAF and protected by Canadian forces. Because of its central location on the southern front, KAF also hosted numerous signals intelligence collection and analysis activities. Those included elements of a National Intelligence Support Team, a U.S. Marine Corps-led unit that supported TF 11 in its high-value target hunt.¹⁰

On the medical front, a Forward Surgical Team, a Preventative Medical Detachment and its associated logistics support was established in the west wing of the air terminal at the airfield.¹¹ Collectively, this was called “Charlie Med.” Feeding the medical chain in the event of casualties was the role of other units stationed at KAF. The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) battalions had dedicated ‘dust off’ medical evacuation UH-60 helicopters

with medics aboard, while the U.S. Air Force maintained a Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) unit at KAF. The CSAR unit had HH-60 helicopters, manned by Pararescue Jumpers who specialized in aircrew extraction in hostile environments. Another Air Force unit that specialized in the air evacuation of casualties back to hospitals in Germany was also stationed at KAF.¹²

KAF was the primary logistics hub for coalition forces in southern Afghanistan. Every conceivable item required by 5 000 troops had to be flown in by air, from vehicles to bullets to water, food and matches. And it all had to be stored and organized somewhere and then protected from the climate, looters, and the enemy.

Simply put, KAF was the lifeline and the brain for the coalition effort in southern Afghanistan. A single accurate 'stonk' from a multiple rocket launcher could have significant adverse effects on the larger ENDURING FREEDOM mission. Enemy infiltration or a raid into the support areas could shut down the air bridge, as could a successful man-portable surface-to-air missile strike on an inbound or outbound C-17. The protection of KAF and all of the resources stationed on it was laid in the hands of the Canadian battle group. That task was vital to the success of ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan.

Sensitive Site Exploitation: The Solid Base of Jihad

On the strategic front, pieces of the Al Qaeda puzzle collected in the Kandahar area and in eastern Afghanistan contributed to the larger picture: What was Al Qaeda capable of, globally? What other operations did it have in the pipeline? Or, in some cases, and just as importantly, what was the organization not capable of doing? Those pieces came from several sources: captured enemy personnel; seized documents and computers; and analysis of the remains of the jihadist training camps and supporting network infrastructure.

KAF also served as a way station and filter for captured enemy personnel. The base maintained a holding area, an interrogation facility, and a document exploitation facility (or DOCEX) all run by the U.S. Army Military Police and Military Intelligence units but augmented by allied and American intelligence and law enforcement agencies. There was a facility elsewhere for higher-ranking prisoners. In effect, both streams of prisoners caught in the south flowed through the base, from low-level Taliban soldiers to high-level Al Qaeda operatives. Depending on their importance, some went to Bagram, some were fed into the American intelligence system, and others remained at KAF, which rapidly became a critical hub for the intelligence effort against global terrorist groups.¹³

An example of this was the capture of Abu Zubaydah. In March 2002, the trilateral links between Bagram, Kandahar, and joint efforts in Pakistan resulted in the seizure of Zubaydah, a high value Al Qaeda leadership target. Zubaydah entered the CIA interrogation

programme and was whisked away to an undisclosed location where he was aggressively interrogated. Abu Zubaydah's closest associates were flown in and handled by the intelligence community at KAF.¹⁴

The exploitation of Zubaydah and his associates produced significant results when combined with the myriad of other pieces of information collected throughout Afghanistan. For example, an individual believed to be planning a radioactive 'dirty bomb' attack in the United States was apprehended in May 2002,¹⁵ though he was in fact planning conventional attacks against civilian high-rise residences.¹⁶ The individual who was "the primary communications link" between the Al Qaeda leadership and the 9/11 hijackers, was seized in Pakistan because of information gleaned at KAF. Other information gathered during sensitive site exploitation operations in Afghanistan, combined with other pieces of intelligence, led investigators to arrest a six-man Al Qaeda cell in Buffalo, New York, before it could mount an operation.¹⁷

Zubaydah, incidentally, had information on Al Qaeda support cells operating in Canada capable of acquiring Canadian passports so that operatives could enter the United States more easily in order to attack targets.¹⁸ Zubaydah also confirmed that Al Qaeda had plans to attack targets in Canada.¹⁹ Other information gathered on Al Qaeda operations suggested that a cell based in Canada attending a Canadian university biology and chemistry programme may have been part of a second wave of planned attacks after 9/11. Plans apparently involved the use of crop dusters to deploy chemical or biological agents, possibly anthrax.²⁰



Photo Credit: Author

There were five major Al Qaeda training facilities situated in and around Kandahar Air Field and a further five support facilities in Kandahar City. These were bombed early on during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and later exploited for intelligence purposes once ground forces arrived at KAF.

Indeed, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM revealed the breathtaking scope of the jihadist training system in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda and its allies maintained over 50 facilities dedicated to the mass production of terrorists with an intake of jihadists from over twenty countries, including Canada. An estimated 20 000 jihadists passed through the Afghanistan training system in the 1990s.²¹ In addition to Canada, they deployed to countries as diverse as Chechnya, China, Morocco, Mexico, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Germany. (See Figure 2-1)

In essence, Al Qaeda was a central player in what amounted to a multinational jihadist culture that was incubated in these facilities. The Taliban maintained its own training facilities (these were seized or otherwise taken over from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's organization in 1995-1996) but, by 2000, there was substantial integration among all jihadist groups. It was increasingly difficult by 2001 to determine where Al Qaeda stopped and the Taliban or the other groups started in this system. The exceptions included some of the groups that were more closely connected to the Pakistani security services but, even there, considerable overlap existed with Lashkar-e-Taiba, for example, or Harkat ul-Ansar in the training system.²²

The situation reached the point where Al Qaeda and the other groups shared facilities, expertise, equipment, and personnel, almost interchangeably. For example, after 'basic training' elsewhere, Lashkar-e-Taiba sent its fighters to the Al Qaeda-controlled Derunta Camp near Jalalabad for advanced training in explosives.²³ Fighters from the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan received SA-7 missile training and counter surveillance training in Kandahar from Chechen and Al Qaeda instructors.²⁴ Al Qaeda trained jihadists from several countries to fight alongside the Taliban in Taliban units as individual replacements at the Khana Gulam Bacha Guesthouse in Kabul²⁵ but also trained 'internationals' to fight as part of the conventional Al Qaeda 055 Brigade against the Northern Alliance.²⁶

That said, Al Qaeda used the training system to identify committed individuals and recruit them for more specialized activities. Those facilities amounted to a system within a system which itself had layers and compartments. For example, numerous sources refer to the Al-Faruq Training Camp, which apparently existed in at least five different locations.²⁷ There was a large facility called Al-Faruq in Paktika province on the border with Pakistan, but the best analogy is that Al-Faruq was the equivalent of a university extension programme for advanced training for jihadists at several locations run by a number of groups as well as a basic training course for new jihadists. In effect, "Al-Faruq" was a cover name for a variety of facilities and activities.²⁸

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM analysts were able to group the more secretive Al Qaeda activities in Afghanistan into several geographical areas and then raid and exploit them in 2002. First, there was Kabul; it housed Al Qaeda headquarters, alongside the Taliban leadership accommodations in the Wazir Akbar Khan district as well as at least five guest

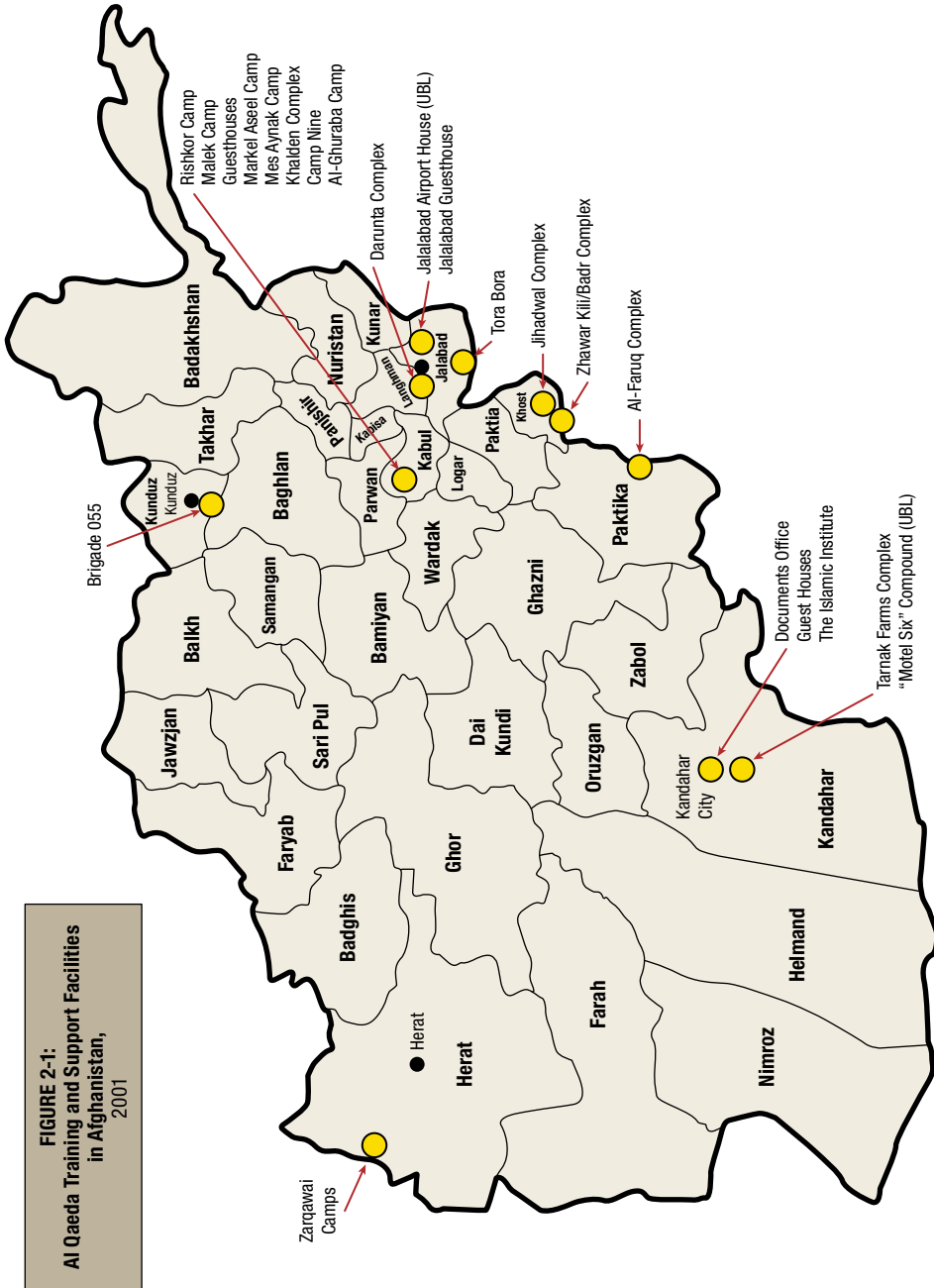


Figure 2-1: Al Qaeda Training and Support Facilities in Afghanistan, 2001

houses for personnel,²⁹ and Al Ghuraba Camp, the home of Abu Musab al-Suri, a man even more radical than bin Laden who pursued the acquisition of chemical, biological, and even nuclear capabilities for Al Qaeda. There was also an urban warfare training course run in the city. But then there was “Camp Nine.” This was a special assassination training camp with a varied curriculum:

[Source] stated during his training, he poisoned rabbits and also saw a video depicting a dog placed in a room with “smoke” that killed the dog. He also explained to [source] that he was trained in counter-surveillance techniques. (Analyst Note: [source’s] training timeline coincides with detainee’s reported training at the camp. [Source’s] poison training is assessed to be similar to the experimentation with cyanide described by [source] and the poisoning of rabbits.³⁰

Also in Kabul were the offices of Ummah Tameer-e-Nau (or UTN), a Pakistani ‘humanitarian’ non-governmental organization that was founded by Bashiruddin Mahmood, the man who ran the Pakistani plutonium processing reactor; a senior Pakistani Army artillery officer; and Hamid Gul, head of the ISI. Document exploitation conducted at this office after a raid confirmed connections between Al Qaeda and elements in the Pakistani nuclear weapons establishment.³¹

Another grouping involved Al Qaeda facilities including the Derunta complex near Jalalabad, which had chemical warfare training in its curriculum and where videos depicting the testing of chemical warfare agents on dogs were discovered. Derunta was characterized as

One of the most important camps...located about eight miles from the eastern city of Jalalabad. Inside this complex were four sub-camps: Abu Khabab camp, where intelligence sources say chemicals and explosives were stored and terrorists were trained in how best to use them to produce the most casualties; Assadalah Abdul Rahman camp, operated by the son of blind cleric Omar Abdel Rahman (currently in jail in the U.S. for plotting to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993) and Hizbi Islami [sic] Camp, operated by a group of Pakistani extremists fighting in Kashmir; and, lastly, the Taliban Camp, where religious militia were trained and indoctrinated to fight the Northern Alliance.³²



Photo Credit: DND AP2002-5617

Sensitive Site Exploitation: The Al Qaeda and jihadist training and support system in Afghanistan consisted of over forty facilities, some in remote areas. Tracking down and examining them for intelligence data helped provide strategic planners with the data on the enemy's global capabilities.

Derunta was filled with jihadists from the Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, and Malaysia and trained people going to fight in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Azerbaijan;³³ it was well known among jihadists for its expertise in explosives, poisons, and “clock bomb” training.³⁴ Of particular interest to the intelligence people were the Al Qaeda cells in Bosnia, who were planning to disrupt the fragile peace that the Canadian Army along with its NATO allies helped establish after 10 years of UN and NATO operations in that region. Those particular plots, planned and funded by Al Qaeda’s operations office, were disrupted before they could take place.³⁵

The third grouping pertained to the facilities in and around Jalalabad. The House of the Algerians was noted for its bomb-making training, especially that involving the use of electronics. “J-Bad” housed facilities for “Maghrebis” (northern Africa-based groups). Most importantly, the Airport House was the bin Laden family house in Jalalabad and served as one of his headquarters.³⁶

Located southeast of Tani, in the mountains on the Pakistan border near Khost, the Zhawar Kili Camp complexes were longstanding jihadist training facilities that had been struck ineffectively in an American cruise missile attack in 1998. Six facilities were considered to include “two of the most important training centres,” Badr-1 and Badr-2, with an estimated training capacity of 350 fighters. Generally, the Badr camps trained fighters destined for Bosnia and Chechnya. Another camp in the complex was part of the Haqqani network and was connected to madrassas in North Waziristan. Al Qaeda was essentially a ‘lodger unit’ in Zhawar Kili.³⁷

Over in Herat province were the mysterious facilities run by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Ostensibly a Taliban facility, the Ziarat Jah Camp was used to train Chechens. Other Al Qaeda camps in the area were apparently used to stockpile nuclear material. Arabs from 18 countries, particularly Lebanese, Jordanians, and Iraqis, trained there on small arms, explosives, and chemical weapons. One team trained there tried to set off a chemical weapon in Amman, Jordan, in 2004 that would have killed an estimated 80 000 people, but the plot was foiled.³⁸ Only Osama bin Laden himself could authorize any visits to these facilities.³⁹ Most importantly, the need to determine the dimensions of Al Qaeda’s interest in nuclear weapons and nuclear material was of primary concern to OEF intelligence personnel and al-Zarqawi topped the list of Al Qaeda leaders to be apprehended. Information was developed that Al Qaeda personnel here were apparently “involved in attempting to procure a nuclear weapon” through a radical group of scientists and officers in Pakistan and that at least two Russian scientists who had nuclear weapons expertise were in contact with Al Qaeda.⁴⁰

Finally, there were the Al Qaeda facilities in and around Kandahar province. It was in those facilities that the 9/11 attacks were planned by Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and it was there that the hijackers trained for the mission and the logistics were based. For example, the Document Office provided forgeries for the hijackers.⁴¹

One jihadist, trained in the Al-Faruq training system, stayed at jihadist guest houses in Kandahar City and used fake passports made at the Document Office in Kandahar to travel to Canada to contact and recruit jihadist cells in 2000. Another jihadist, when apprehended using data from Kandahar, was also determined to have used Canada as a base. When asked why Canada, he replied, “Canada accepted everyone.”⁴²

The “Mall Six Complex” was the main Al Qaeda administration base, which also housed bin Laden, his deputies, their families, and their bodyguards. This collection of mud brick houses in five rows of six was one kilometre from KAF. Only Al Qaeda personnel were permitted entry.⁴³

The Abu Zubaydah Camp at Tarnak Farms, 10 kilometres south of KAF, was also known as “The Commando Camp” by the jihad community. The facility had nearly 100 buildings and a large range. The curriculum included surface-to-air missile training; escape and evasion; urban warfare; mountain, desert and jungle training; explosives; and sniping, poisons and chemical training.⁴⁴ One surface-to-air missile team trained there was involved in a failed attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner in Mombasa.⁴⁵

The airport itself was used for terrorist scenarios involving airliners and airports. Surface-to-air missile training was conducted on specialized ranges. Al Qaeda’s Kandahar facilities included what captured personnel referred to as ‘The Chemical Laboratory’ ‘where approximately 40 to 50 insurgent fighters received training while they stayed at the al-Ansar guesthouse.... Experiments were conducted at the laboratory including explosives and chemicals to be used as poisons, choking agents, and blister agents.’⁴⁶ And then there was the Al Qaeda anthrax development programme adjacent to the laboratory.⁴⁷ As it turned out, there were two parallel but separate Al Qaeda programmes developing weaponized anthrax in Kandahar, one led by a Pakistani scientist and another by a Malaysian Army captain. There were linkages between one of these projects and a cell based at a Canadian university.⁴⁸

An important project under development in Kandahar since 1999 involved “nuclear related explosive experiments in the desert” by senior Al Qaeda leader Abd al Aziz al-Masri.⁴⁹ This was likely some form of radiological dispersal device testing. In later years, Kutchi nomads made reference to ‘Pakistanis’ that made ‘big explosions’ in the Registan or ‘Reg’ Desert that caused ‘a drought.’ Some form of chemical was also employed against people in the desert that made the targets bleed from all of the orifices in their head.⁵⁰

Another example of how important KAF was involved a sensitive site exploitation mission conducted against an Al Qaeda camp two hours east of the base in February 2002. During the course of the operation, an Al Qaeda ‘conduct after capture’ manual was recovered and exploited. Those documents were used during the 2003 interrogation of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Al Qaeda’s operations officer, to offset his resistance to interrogation. From those interrogations, an Al Qaeda operative planning to conduct other terrorist attacks in the United States was intercepted and captured.⁵¹

There were numerous Al Qaeda operations in various stages of conceptualization or implementation when Operation ENDURING FREEDOM intervened. Those included a plan to ram a passenger airliner into Library Tower in Los Angeles sometime in late 2001; an operation in late December 2001 to attack ships at anchor in Singapore that was thwarted by the capture of the Al Qaeda team sent to do the job; the 2002 attempt to blow up tankers passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, which also led to the apprehension of another Al Qaeda team; and the 2002 operation to attack Heathrow Airport, Canary Wharf, and Big Ben with hijacked airliners.⁵² Most importantly, an Al Qaeda overseas operations planning and training cell was eventually uncovered; the cell relocated from Kandahar to Shakai, Pakistan, and set about developing a new series of overseas plots, which were disrupted or did not come to fruition for a variety of reasons.⁵³

Almost none of the information on the jihadist training system and the Al Qaeda support structure was known by the countries engaged in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM until it was revealed throughout the course of operations in 2002. Without a secure operating base in southern Afghanistan to conduct site exploitation and identify detainees, it is likely that none of that information would have come to light and that plots as deadly as 9/11 or worse would have occurred in North America and elsewhere.

Securing Kandahar Air Field

On arrival on 15 February 2002, 3 PPCLI Battle Group was immediately tasked with the perimeter defence of KAF. The threat assessment in Afghanistan indicated that the situation was unstable. Prominent Al Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, were still loose, as were the main Taliban leaders Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Mullah Akhtar Osmani, and Mullah Mohammed Omar. Jalaluddin Haqqani, of the Haqqani tribal network, was somewhere in Khost. There were reports of an assassination plot against the Afghan Interim Administration leader Hamid Karzai. Significantly “rumours of an attempted Taliban resurgence continue to surface but are proving hard to verify...the latest incidents in Kabul may indicate the re-emergence of a Taliban command and control capability, but it will be some time before it becomes fully operational.”⁵⁴

The existing KAF defensive plan was rudimentary and expedient – some of the positions were only 20 metres away from the runway itself and did not have interlocking fields of fire. For example, a Marine infantry battalion had originally seized the airfield, dug their initial defensive positions, and then a U.S. Army infantry battalion replaced them and made some modifications, but neither unit was emplaced for the long haul. There were three sectors: Blue was north of the runway, White was the southwestern section, and Red included the terminal and southeastern section, plus the ammunition storage area, which was between Blue and White. KAF was a hazardous place; there was unexploded ordnance everywhere in addition to minefields dating back to the 1980s, as well as aircraft of all types, shapes, and sizes manoeuvring around the ramps and runways. (See Figure 2-2)

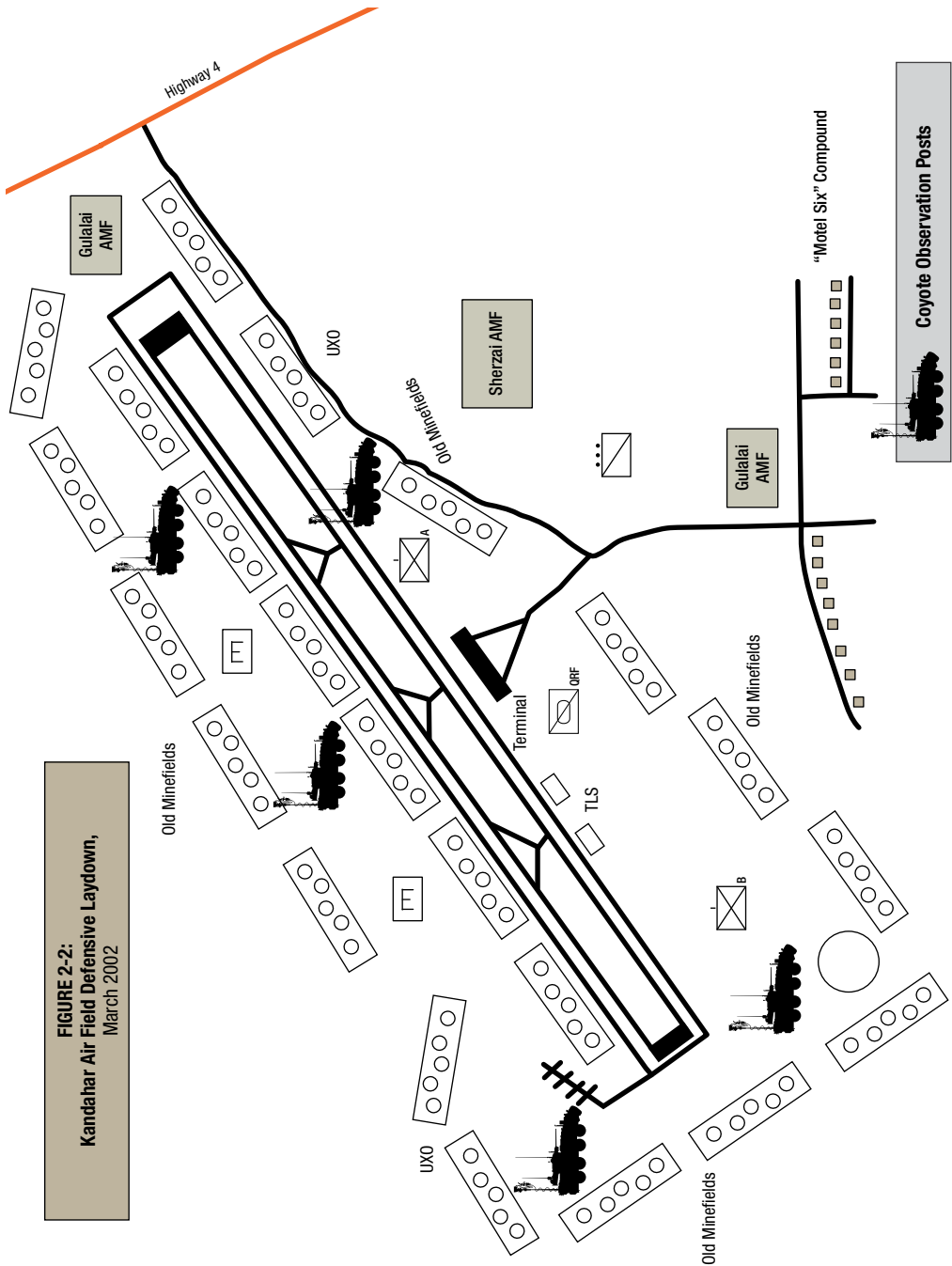


FIGURE 2-2:
Kandahar Air Field Defensive Laydown,
March 2002

Figure 2-2: Kandahar Air Field Defensive Laydown, March 2002



Photo Credit: Author

One of the many fortifications constructed by Canadian and American engineers on the perimeter of Kandahar Air Field in 2002. This example was photographed in 2007 long after that perimeter had been dramatically extended to house over 17 000 personnel.

3 PPCLI Battle Group was thrown into the breach within 24 hours. B Company, led by Maj Mike Blackburn, went into the White positions, and A Company, led by Maj Sean Hackett, took over Red sector. Maj Rod Keller's 12 Field Squadron, acting as infantry, took over Blue. Maj Tom Bradley and Recce Squadron arrived and started mobile patrols with their Coyote vehicles. They were joined by a platoon of U.S. Army TOW missile Hummers equipped with thermal imagery systems. Once the lay of the land was established, Recce Squadron developed a detailed surveillance plan for the Coyotes. The squadron was equipped with 12 Coyotes that were split into a Quick Reaction Force Troop and a Surveillance Troop. The Surveillance Troop dug in next to the infantry companies and engineers and then set up their mast-mounted sensors at five locations on the KAF perimeter. This gave the KAF defenders ground night observation capability out to nearly 25 km, rather than the 5 km range capability that the American units possessed.⁵⁵



Photo Credit: DND APD02 5000-133c

Coyote recon and surveillance vehicles from The Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) provided all-round coverage of Kandahar Air Field with their mast-mounted systems, freeing up nearly a battalion of United States infantry initially assigned to the task.

The importance of the Coyotes' presence at KAF cannot be understated. They permitted the defenders to reduce the number of personnel dedicated to point defence of the airfield, which freed up those troops to deploy outside the wire elsewhere on operations. The long-range sensors and ability to direct accurate fire gave the defenders increased standoff, which in theory forced any potential enemy with a direct or indirect fire system away from the base, thus reducing their accuracy and decreasing their chances of striking something vital. In one instance, the improved capacity saved the lives of Afghan civilians as the Coyotes were able to determine that they were not a threat, and alerted other units not to engage. Such an engagement could have had dire consequences for the OEF-Afghan relationship.⁵⁶



Photo Credit: DND IS2002-0092a

3 PPLI Battle Group was a light infantry organization and as such did not bring a full complement of vehicles. Borrowed Humvees were used in patrolling and for civil-military cooperation tasks.

An ad hoc joint Canadian-American Electronic and Signals Intelligence Warfare Team was also established early on. Members of 2 EW Squadron and the Canadian Forces Information Operations Group, with their specially equipped vehicle and mobile teams, worked with American teams from both conventional and special forces. The U.S. Army teams with their PROPHET data collection and processing systems operated in an uncoordinated fashion at first, but when the American commanders realized the capabilities of 2 EW personnel, they put the Canadians in charge of coordinating signals intelligence and

electronic warfare activity relating to the defence of the airfield. This joint organization had 8 Canadians and 24 Americans. Canadian mobile teams worked with American, German, Australian, Norwegian, New Zealand, and United States SOFs, while the American Mobile Electronic Warfare Teams worked with Recce Squadron's QRF patrols in the air field's perimeter, intercepting and then responding to "hits."⁵⁷

In time, the Americans emplaced their Remotely Monitored Battlefield Sensor (REMBAS) system on the perimeter. One of those resulted in the capture of an insurgent and the seizure of extremely lethal RPO-A thermobaric munitions – weapons capable of generating incredible blast effects. The increased number of manned and unmanned surveillance systems on and over the airfield, including an over-the-horizon radar from U.S. Marine Corps, demanded better coordination and deconfliction. Maj Mark Campbell, OC Support Company, created an information, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) matrix to coordinate all of the systems, which significantly improved this chaotic state of affairs.

Similarly, the number of engineering assets on the airfield, which now included the bulk of a U.S. Army light engineer battalion, a Canadian combat engineer squadron, and Norwegian and Croatian demining and unexploded ordnance disposal crews, demanded better coordination. Using the doctrinal Canadian Engineer Support Coordination Centre as a basis for this, Maj Rod Keller and his small staff were able to significantly improve coalition engineering coordination at KAF.⁵⁸

3 PPCLI Battle Group also developed close connections with Afghan forces that were part of the security plan. Local anti-Taliban forces in the region coalesced around two rival leaders – Commanders Gul Agha Sherzai and Haji Gulalai. Their forces were collectively called the Afghan Militia Forces (AMF). The AMF was lightly equipped but highly mobile. The Sherzai and Gulalai AMFs were hired to provide a layer of security outside of that provided by the perimeter forces. In time, they also occupied security towers alongside Canadian and American soldiers. Their initial liaison with coalition forces was through U.S. Special Forces, but as 3 PPCLI Battle Group came on line, they developed a relationship with the Canadians through the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) officer, Capt Alex Watson, and with Recce Platoon. The AMF accompanied battle group patrols and operations related to the 'extended perimeter' (that is, everything outside of the immediate KAF security perimeter). (See Figure 2-3)

An example was Operation CLEAN SWEEP, a cordon and search of the Hajji Mohammad Shah Kalay region, north of the airfield in June 2002. Afghan information indicated that there was a large heavy-weapons cache in the community. An engineer section and a rifle section accompanied a platoon (later increased to more than a company) from the Gulalai militia while a quick reaction force from Recce Squadron, AH-64 attack helicopters, and

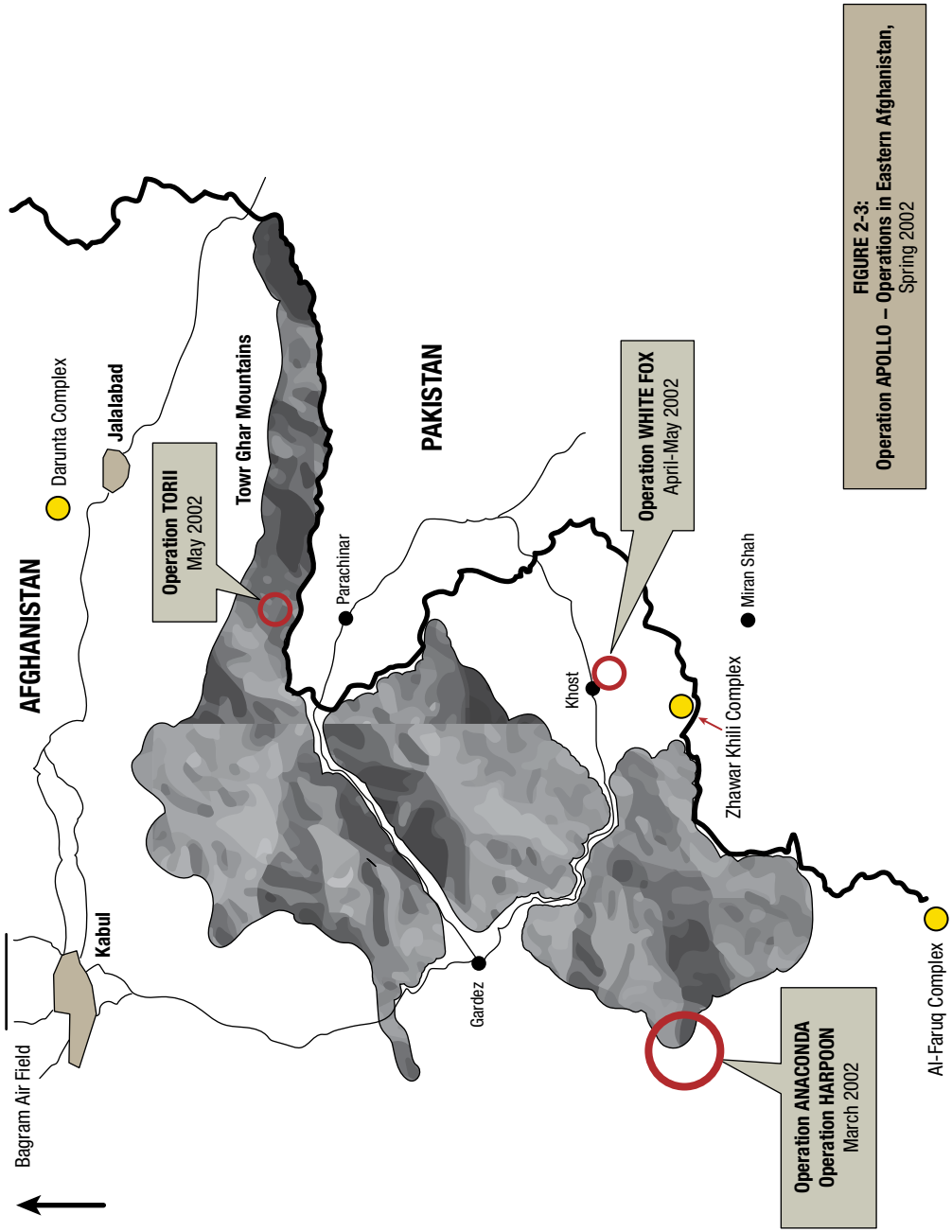


Figure 2-3: Operation APOLLO – Operations in Eastern Afghanistan, Spring 2002

UH-60 MEDEVAC helicopters remained in the background. Though the search was extensive, nothing was found. This led the battle group to believe that there were other Afghan motives behind the operation.

Another significant operation was GREY HUSKY on 7 April 2002. Intelligence sources suggested that a BM-21 multiple-rocket launcher was hidden in Arghistan district east of KAF and that enemy forces might move it into position to 'stonk' the airfield. Elements of Recce Squadron, Recce Platoon, and the AMF deployed out to Arghistan to locate and seize the weapon and to demonstrate the coalition forces' freedom of movement. The weapon was not found but the message was conveyed. Other than routine movements back and forth to Kandahar City KAF coalition forces at this point rarely deployed there but SOF operated in the city for significant periods. KAF was a 'launch pad' for special operations forces direct action and airmobile operations conducted elsewhere, so excursions, such as GREY HUSKY, were significant events.

Canadian QRFs also responded to any serious incident in the protective zone around the airfield. One of these involved an accident that killed four American personnel as they were disarming a rocket stash. A section from B Company handled the initial response and the clean-up. In a separate incident, three Rangers were killed in the Tarnak Farms training area when setting off either unexploded ordnance or a booby trap. In another incident, a U.S. Army AH-64 Apache went down; a QRF led by Capt Jay Adair secured the site. In another case, a Canadian platoon, a forward observation officer/forward air controller (FOO/FAC), and a medic were tasked with escorting the investigation team examining the crash of an MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft that went down near Band-e Sardeh in June 2002. The team was inserted by CH-47 and extracted without incident.

Canada's first abortive foray into interagency cooperation also occurred in the context of KAF security. Enemy surface-to-air missile teams could infiltrate Afghan villages on the KAF flight path. Little contact had been made with the populations in those areas, so Capt Alex Watson was tasked with generating what was at the time called a humanitarian aid plan. Capt Watson subsequently developed a relationship with the communities northwest of KAF. LCol Stogran saw the inherent benefits of the plan and requested \$50 000; the request went to Ottawa to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) which in turn promptly refused to have anything to do with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. No amount of high-level cajoling could get CIDA to budge, so LCol Stogran put requests out to military families back in Edmonton for clothes and other supplies. These were put into the resupply chain. Capt Watson, in a hastily tailored civilian suit, was sent to Dubai to meet with expatriate Afghan businessmen and others to raise aid funds. In time, Capt Watson was able to have wells drilled, a school built, and other local schools refurbished, all in critical communities surrounding KAF.

Fundamentally, though, there was a lot of inactivity and boredom in the KAF protection task. The threat dropped to “low” as time went on and it became apparent that the enemy was not at the gates. But was this a critical task? Yes. Was it a vital ground? Yes. Was it exciting? No. It was hot, and it got hotter into the spring and summer with temperatures climbing to the high 40s. With the heat came snakes, spiders, and scorpions. The terrain was drab. There were few inhabitants. Accommodations consisted of two-man nylon crew tents set up on rocky ground. Morale, welfare and recreation consisted of the “Flintstone Gym.” The food was uninspiring. Communications back home were sporadic. It was noisy, as KAF was one of the busiest airfields in the world. Sleep was difficult unless one was thoroughly exhausted. In time, even the coalition and Tier I special operations forces got bored and accompanied Canadian patrols in and around the airfield perimeter. On one occasion, the KSK (German Special Forces) operators were in the back of a Bison armoured personnel carrier that struck a mine but there were no casualties.

The situation started to change during the tour, however, as warnings of potential rocket attacks increased. There was a notable increase in coalition and Afghan vehicle mine strikes on patrol roads, which prompted increased surveillance tasks. Two members of the Gulalai militia died in one attack, while the wounded were tended to by Canadian and American medics. On another occasion, Gulalai’s compound was targeted and the ammo supply was blown up. Intelligence indicators suggested it was an inside job by an agent.

The first wispy visages of the insurgency that would later engulf southern and eastern Afghanistan were recorded by analysts during this time. A major SOF direct action mission in Deh Rawod, Oruzgan Province killed fifteen enemy and netted twenty seven with knowledge of leadership movements. That information led to subsequent successful direct actions throughout Kandahar City thus attenuating the fledgeling insurgency. Another raid captured Mullah Omar’s brother. The Taliban’s response was to post leaflets in public places in Helmand province and Kandahar province calling for resistance. Mullah Omar directed the dispersion of remaining weapons stocks to those fighters who wanted to join him.⁵⁹

At the same time, Al Qaeda operatives were deliberately aggravating inter-tribal feuds in Gardez and Khost to undermine attempts by the Afghan Interim Administration to assert control in the area.⁶⁰ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) organization was also believed to be reconstituting for operations in Kabul.⁶¹ And, ominously, there were violent protests against Afghan Interim Administration poppy eradication operations in Nangarhar and Oruzgan provinces. A decision was made by the AIA to avoid poppy eradication in Helmand province out of fear that it would affect the counterinsurgency campaign by driving the population into the arms of the former government-turned-insurgents.⁶²

Supporting Operation APOLLO

Logistics support for the battle group in Afghanistan fell on the shoulders of two organizations: the battalion Administration Company and the Forward Support Group, under the command of Maj Colin Blair. The FSG consisted of 77 personnel, including drivers, traffic techs, ‘posties,’ a supply platoon, and a signals element drawn from numerous units across Canada.

The FSG’s relationship with TF Rakkasan 626th FSB was superb. Arrangements worked out between Maj Colin Blair and Lt Col Tom Pirozzi, the 626th commander, included the pooling of rations and the ration site maintenance and control, refueling, vehicle maintenance, ammunition accounting, storage and protection. Canadian logisticians and technicians worked alongside their American counterparts in all of those areas. The ammunition storage area was particularly risky, as it lay on the edge of the perimeter. Three Canadian ammo techs and their American counterparts were responsible for the protection and maintenance of the site – the Canadian signals personnel even ran a landline out to the site so that the team could communicate with the FSG. In all cases, this gave the opportunity for Canadians to conduct on-the-job training in non-traditional areas. For example, Canadian refueling personnel from the FSG assisted in refueling U.S. Air Force C-17 aircraft and U.S. Army CH-47 and AH-64 helicopters in addition to Canadian equipment. The FSG contributed to improving American accountability, especially when it came to fuel consumption rates and teaching spreadsheet employment.⁶³

Another critical area of cooperation was in the handling of the water point. 12 Field Squadron brought a reverse osmosis water purification unit (ROWPU) and personnel to operate it. The 626th FSB also deployed water purification equipment but had few trained personnel to use it. The Canadian ROWPU team ran the water point using both countries’ equipment as necessary. An experimental bagging unit was tested but the heat burst the bags and soldiers reverted back to canteens and bottled water.

The removal of human waste is a significant challenge for any military force deployed into an austere environment. If this activity is not performed effectively, disease, insects, and rodents can cripple the strongest fighting formation – and they have throughout military history. When the Canadian battle group and TF Rakkasan arrived, they were dismayed by the sanitary practices of the former occupants of the airfield. Little or no attempt had been made at long-term waste disposal. The supply techs from the FSG supply platoon scrounged wood and saws in order to fabricate outhouses, complete with the half-moon cut into the doors. Americans who saw the Canadian-modified facilities put in a request for the Canadian “carpentry section” to build more but, to their surprise, there was no carpentry section; this was just a Canadian initiative.⁶⁴

The U.S. Army logistics system was able to get a shipment of plastic portable toilets in on a C-17, but they only came in six at a time. The main issue was not the number of 'Blue Rockets'; rather, it was the lack of equipment to pump them out and then the lack of a location to dump the human waste produced by over 3 000 people on a daily basis. The FSG with its global contacts and the engineers from 12 Field Squadron came to the rescue.⁶⁵

The Joint Staff in Ottawa did not initially believe that the request for "shit suckers" was genuine and did not entertain it at the time. The FSG had to put in a formal Request for Forces through Tampa to get the ball rolling. At the same time, and working with 626th FSB, the U.S. Air Force was convinced that the vacuum machines were a force protection issue and agreed to deploy a C-17 in order to pick up the vacuum machines and deliver them to KAF on a priority basis.⁶⁶

Through informal contacts, the FSG personnel knew that there were two vacuum systems pre-positioned at a site near Brindisi, Italy. The machines had been used to support Canadian operations in the Balkans. A U.S. Air Force C-17 was dispatched and the vacuum machines were brought to KAF. As they were not self-propelled, 626th FSB provided two trucks. The resulting Canadian-American configurations were dubbed "Piglet" and "Pooh."

As the FSG and 626th vehicle technicians figured out how to mount the vacuum systems on the 'SSTs' ("Shit Sucker Trucks"), Sgt Mark Pennie from 12 Field Squadron worked on the leach pond. The engineers were tasked to dig a circular structure with several pie-like segments. Human waste was progressively put through each segment to clean it as much as possible. The request was sent to the CIMIC officer, Capt Alex Watson, to acquire two live chickens. After delivery from the market in Kandahar City, the chickens had their throats cut and were thrown into one of the grey water-filled segments. The bacteria from the demised chickens assisted with the chemical breakdown of the human waste at that stage in the process. Sgt Pennie was subsequently awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his operation of the reverse osmosis water purification unit, but many Canadians and Americans at KAF thought that it should have been awarded for his plan for the leach pond.⁶⁷

Once on the ground in Kandahar, the FSG was supposed to link to a logistics system that stretched all the way back several thousand miles to Canada – without a supporting port, which had been the norm in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Everything had to come in by air. The means by which it would do so, however, was complicated by the convoluted planning process at many levels and by the uncertainty that reigned throughout the summer of 2002 with regards to the battle group mission. There were multiple entities prepared to feed the National Support Element. First, there were the SLOC or Strategic Lines of Communication, an entity that consisted of 1 General Support Battalion and 1 Service Battalion personnel operating out of Qatar. Their task was to receive two ships bearing 60 days of stocks. Then there was the ILOC or Integrated Line of Communication, a Cold War arrangement

with the Americans whereby Canadian material is fed into the American airlift system and deposited at a forward site. The North American end of the ILOC was Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, with Kandahar and Bagram Air Fields as the forward sites. Eventually, Camp Mirage stood up in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with its Canadian C-130 Hercules transports. However, the FSG was told that this was a navy and air force support base and that they were not to use it or make requests of the logistics units deployed there; they were to rely on the SLOC in Qatar and the ILOC.⁶⁸

If the Canadian logisticians needed an item, the request chain was somewhat confusing. In theory, the FSG had to deal with the J-4 at JTF South West Asia in Tampa, who then communicated with the Associate Deputy Minister Material/J-4 in Ottawa to arrange for the required items to be fed into the ILOC if they could not be fulfilled from the SLOC stocks in Qatar. The FSG staff also got requests for information from some logistics entity in Kuwait but were not sure where they fit into the scheme of things. That was the ideal structure. For practical purposes, there were serious problems, however. First, there was the SLOC. No status of forces agreement existed between Canada and Qatar, so the Canadian personnel were confined to the base and were restricted in what they could do. The ships were not permitted to unload at Qatar, so the 60 days of stocks could not be drawn on. Second, there was the ILOC. The stream took at least 30 days from request to delivery. This wasn't a matter of American preference of their own needs over Canadian requirements as some alleged—the American supply chain ran all the way from Afghanistan through Europe to Dover to California, where American stocks were warehoused and it took time to move materiel through the system. This put the FSG in a bit of a bind and forced it to take “Radar O'Reilly-like” expedient measures to ensure that the battle group was supplied with what it needed to conduct operations in Afghanistan. For example, the FSG Operations Officer, Capt Marjorie Coakwell, sent separate emails to all of the Canadian logistics entities; whoever replied positively first, she dealt with. There appeared to be no hierarchy to the system. On one occasion, critical spares for Coyote vehicles were needed immediately and none of the logistics groups were responsive. As the DHL courier company flew into KAF with AN-12 transports, the Canadian logisticians used DHL to courier the spares from Montreal forward to Afghanistan. This took four days instead of several weeks.⁶⁹

In time, Canada negotiated a secret arrangement with the United Arab Emirates to use Minhad Air Base as a logistics and personnel way station. Dubbed Camp Mirage, the Canadian contingent was forced to maintain a low profile. In effect, strategic airlift that could not operate in hostile airspace, such as the CC-150 Polaris aircraft flew into Minhad, and the personnel and equipment were transferred to Canadian CC-130 Hercules equipped with defensive systems for the flight into KAF. Camp Mirage eventually was called the Theatre Support Base manned by the Theatre Support Element.

The Canadian SOF organization had its own dedicated logistics capability and its own airlift. The FSG technically did not have access to it, but an informal arrangement was made between individuals from the two organizations so that they could provide low-level and expedient support to each other on small or critical items. Generally, however, the SOF remained a separate entity.

The near-elimination of Canadian Forces bands during the reductions of the 1990s, coupled with the personnel cap for Operation APOLLO, meant that the battle group had no formal musical support for the operation. An informal “Kandahar Pipes and Drums” was organized by soldiers who had talent and brought their own instruments. Led by Capt Gordon Hagar, four bagpipers were able to provide the required support at KAF.

The Canadian pipers were thrown right into the breach on 20 February 2002, following an incident where an Australian SAS Regiment patrol hit a mine while on an operation. U.S. Air Force Pararescue Jumpers jumped into the minefield to stabilize and recover the wounded, but Trooper Andrew Russell died on the scene. The SAS Regiment second-in-command asked the pipers to play at the ramp ceremony, which was held at 2400 hours while the media were sleeping. When the pipers played “Amazing Grace,” however, this woke some of the media, who demanded to be allowed to film the event. This demand was rebuffed by American public affairs staff. “Flowers of the Forest” and “Scotland the Brave” were played as the coffin was placed aboard a C-17 and the honour guard departed.

The Kandahar Pipes and Drums would go on to play other ramp ceremonies, but the most important was undoubtedly the repatriation of the four Canadians killed during the Tarnak Farms bombing. Only those present can appreciate the poignancy of having bagpipes at that event.

Operation GREEN GOPHER: 25-28 February 2002

In late February 2002, 5 Platoon was warned to prepare to assist in an important sensitive site exploitation mission. A ‘guest’ Canadian referred to as “Dr. Evil” arrived at KAF escorted by a heavily armed team drawn from the CIA, the FBI, and the Port Authority Police Department. “Dr. Evil” was a biologist involved in anthrax research.

There were serious concerns that Al Qaeda was interested in acquiring or developing and then deploying biological and chemical weapons. When Al Qaeda was based in Sudan, bin Laden invested money in Sudanese government research organizations investigating chemical weapons production and use.⁷⁰ Al Qaeda also was in contact with the Hussein regime in Iraq sometime in 1994 and discussions were undertaken regarding the transfer of biological warfare and chemical warfare expertise to Al Qaeda.⁷¹ Those relationships bore fruit when Al Qaeda acted as the link between the Taliban regime and the Hussein regime. This link involved the deployment of Iraqi chemical warfare personnel to Afghanistan in 1998.⁷²

Right after the 9/11 attacks, letters containing powdered anthrax arrived at the offices of several American news agencies, government officials, and private citizens. Five of the people subsequently died and around 50 others were infected. The assumption that Al Qaeda was subjecting the United States to bio-terrorism was made, and copycat incidents pushed public hysteria (and Cipro production) to new levels.⁷³ Anthrax was also mailed to a number of government addresses in Kenya.⁷⁴ Canada was not immune. On 16 October 2001, Parliament Hill was evacuated when mail handlers developed symptoms that could have been anthrax-related. A cabinet minister then received white powder in the mail. This material was quarantined and flown by a Canadian Forces aircraft to a lab in Winnipeg for analysis. A similar incident at Queen's Park in Toronto in February 2002 resulted in the evacuation of 2 000 people.⁷⁵

CIA analysis of captured Al Qaeda material pointed to a possible former production site somewhere south of KAF.⁷⁶ The most likely location was in the Al Qaeda complex at Tarnak Farms, an agricultural area and village seven kilometres south of the airfield that had been commandeered and converted into a terrorist training centre. Those sites had been bombed heavily during the air campaign. The possibility that biological or chemical agents could be present at the site meant that a significant operation had to be established. GREEN GOPHER was the code name assigned to this sensitive site exploitation mission.

GREEN GOPHER was a multinational, inter-agency affair. Given the uncertainty of the research facility's exact location, the CIA decided to fly in "Dr. Evil," who was being questioned about his links to Ayman al-Zawahiri by authorities in Pakistan. He was escorted by a CIA/FBI/Port Authority Police Department team. A technical exploitation unit consisting of chemical and biological warfare specialists had to be brought in to do the actual exploitation. Criminal Investigation Division investigators had to be able to run DNA tests on any bodies encountered. Combat engineers would be needed to disarm any booby traps. Decontamination and medical facilities, established forward in case of casualties, were also needed. Finally, the whole force needed to be escorted to and from Tarnak Farms, and a perimeter had to be set up to protect the entire effort while it was in progress.⁷⁷

5 Platoon's task was to escort the SSE force and to provide security at the site in conjunction with the AMF while the job was in progress, and then to ensure that the enemy did not re-seed the site with new mines and booby-traps the following night. A number of MLVW 2.5-ton trucks from the FSG and some American Humvees from 2nd Battalion 187 Infantry were borrowed to give 5 Platoon mobility.⁷⁸

"Dr. Evil" confirmed that the Tarnak Farms site was the one he had equipped for Al Qaeda over the course of three visits culminating in January 2001. The explosive ordnance disposal team cleared a surface approach to this site. The Technical Escort Unit and the Other Government Agency team found "vials, beakers, new-looking lab equipment and a

new building containing sinks, shelves, and a large amount of countertop space.” “Dr. Evil” confirmed that this was some of the equipment he acquired, but this was not the place used to store biological material and that “there were some appliances missing.” The team decided to conduct a more complete exploitation on this and the other site the next day.⁷⁹

Trying to establish communications links, 5 Platoon spent a lot of time ‘herding cats’ in the marshalling area; each packet had to be in place in a specific order. For example, 626th FSB had to establish a separate site with medical and decontamination facilities in case personnel conducting the exploitation were exposed to chemical or biological agents. This meant escorting 6 000 gallons of water and the decontamination team down Highway 4 and then west towards Tarnak Farms prior to deployment of the other elements.⁸⁰

The Technical Escort Unit exploitation of the biological warfare lab involved photographing the entire facility in detail and collecting swab samples. One of the Afghan interpreters told the team that “someone used to haul out black liquids in large vials for the people that used to work here.” On completion of the task, the Technical Escort Unit and the Other Government Agency concluded that “this lab was set up in a manner to produce anthrax,” but no pathogens could be identified by the swipe tests. The samples had to be sent back to the United States for detailed study.⁸¹

Led by Lt Cowan, 5 Platoon moved off down Highway 4, escorting a circus array of vehicles – a mini-flail, an armoured bulldozer, an excavator, a dump truck, water trucks, and Humvees loaded with Criminal Investigation Division investigators, scientists, and CIA personnel. The force arrived at Tarnak Farms without incident. The magnitude of the damage made the task unmanageable in the time frame assigned to GREEN GOPHER and the decision was made to withdraw and pick up the lab team on the way back to KAF.⁸²

GREEN GOPHER was just one of many similar sensitive site exploitations conducted by coalition forces in Afghanistan in 2001–2002. Such operations rarely had an immediate and tangible pay-off, as the data collected were pieces of a much larger puzzle, in a much larger game. Though the battle group’s participation was limited, it did provide participants with an opportunity to see that their efforts were part of a larger war.

Analysis of the sites in Afghanistan led the intelligence community to conclude, in May 2003, that Al Qaeda “and associated extremist groups have a wide variety” of chemical and biological agents available to them. Specifically, “training videos found in Afghanistan show [Al Qaeda] tests of easily produced chemical agents based on cyanide” and “the group has crude procedures for making mustard agent, sarin, and VX [nerve agents].” Al Qaeda “has explored the possibility of using agricultural aircraft for large-area dissemination of biological warfare agents such as anthrax.” The group “has openly expressed its desire to produce nuclear weapons. We know that the group could easily construct a radiological dispersal device [which] could result in panic and enormous economic damage.”⁸³

Operation ANACONDA and Operation HARPOON: March 2002

As the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces retreated south of Kabul in January 2002, interviews with displaced persons suggested that the enemy was preparing a last stand in the Shah-i-Kot region near Gardez. This formidable mountainous area consisted of a high feature dubbed “The Whale” in the west, followed by a valley with the town of Serkhankhel in it to the east. Then there was literally a wall of mountains to the east of the town, with numerous passes leading to the Chumara and Naka valleys, followed by more rough terrain and then Pakistan. The town of Serkhankhel lay in the valley between The Whale and the mountains. Estimates of how many enemy were present varied in the high hundreds – and there was a possibility that leadership targets were hiding there as well. (See Figure 2-4)

Between 13 and 20 February 2002, the American staffs formulated an ambitious plan called Operation ANACONDA. Infiltrating special operations forces would gain access to and take down air defence positions. A surprise air assault would then establish blocking positions in the eastern passes with American infantry companies. U.S. Special Forces and AMF would then enter the Serkhankhel Valley like a piston and push the enemy into the blocking positions, while air power and SOF hunted and destroyed anybody trying to escape.⁸⁴

Fortuitously, the arrival of 3 PPCLI in Kandahar freed up U.S. forces protecting KAF to participate in Operation ANACONDA. As there were specialist deficiencies, an American request went to 3 PPCLI for additional snipers. After some debate with the DCDS staff in Ottawa, this request was granted and five Canadian snipers were assigned to 1st and 2nd Battalions, 187th Infantry for the operation.⁸⁵

Early in the cold morning of 2 March 2002, special operations forces cleared the way for the air assault as the CH-47 Chinooks loaded with troops thumped their way into the blocking positions. Things started to go wrong at nearly every phase of the operation. Helicopters were shot down, there was uncoordinated air support, and casualties started to mount. Within minutes of landing, Canadian snipers MCpl Arron Perry, MCpl Graham Ragsdale, and Cpl Dennis Eason came under direct and indirect fire as they disembarked with their American counterparts. While the landing force went to ground on their landing zone, the three snipers moved to the high ground, remained in the open, and were able to bring effective fire onto the enemy.⁸⁶

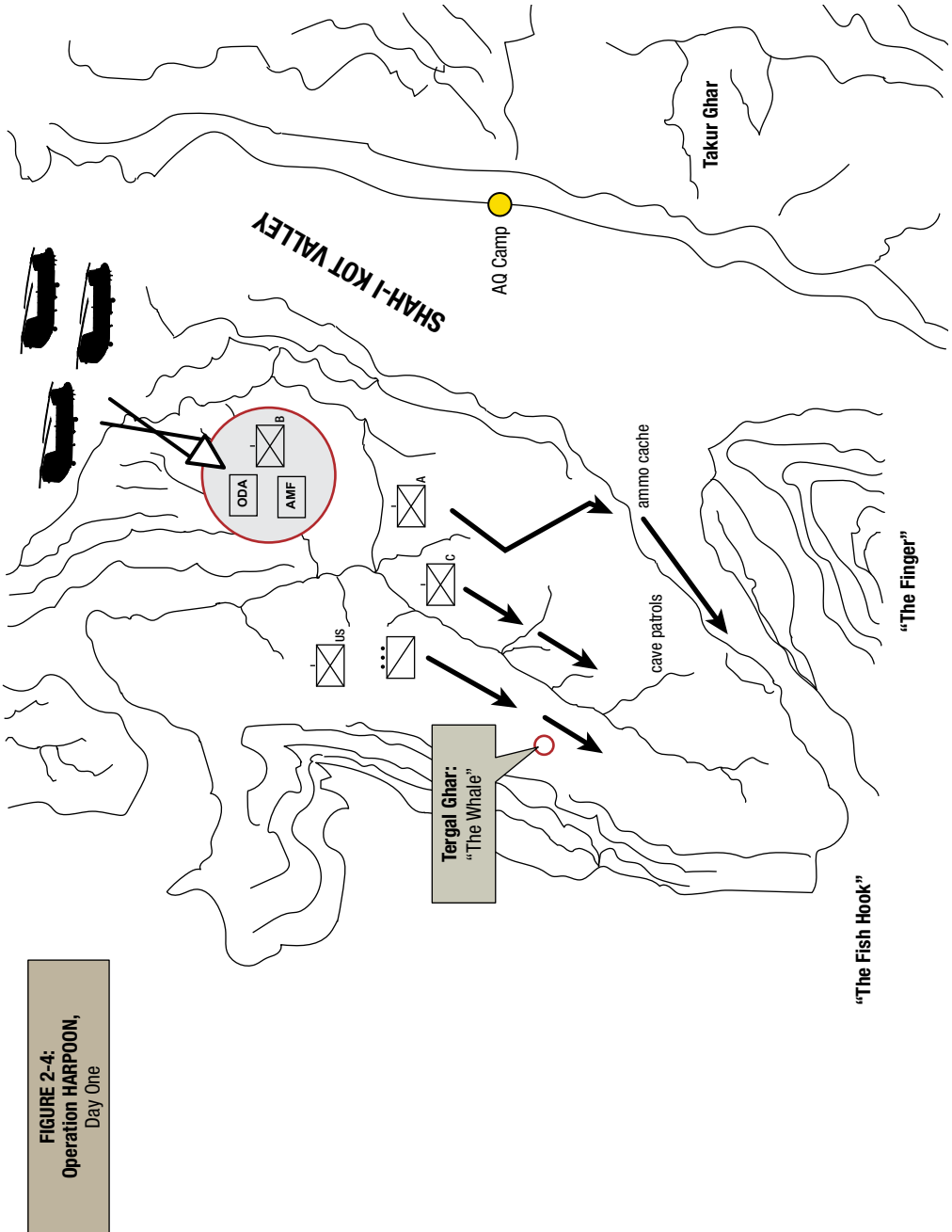


FIGURE 2-4:
Operation HARPOON,
Day One

Figure 2-4: Operation HARPOON, Day One



Photo Credit: DND AP2002-5583

Operation HARPOON turned out to be anticlimactic, but the anticipation and stress during the initial insertion of troops onto the 'Whale' feature was very real. Padres provided services on the ramp at Bagram Air Field prior to the air assault.

The next day MCpl Tim McMeekin and Cpl Robert Furlong, working with 1-187 Infantry, were in a patrol base that came under fire. Relocating, the sniper team engaged a number of enemy insurgents at ranges greater than 1 400 metres. Over the next several days, the Canadian snipers moved around the battlefield, engaging and disrupting the enemy at long range with their McMillan Brothers TAC-50 sniper rifles.⁸⁷ Furlong successfully engaged an enemy machine gunner at nearly two and half kilometres, which was at the time a world record shot. This feat resulted in increased 'street cred' and prestige for the Canadian intelligence and liaison staffs working alongside the American brigade headquarters.⁸⁸ All five Canadian snipers were recommended for and eventually received the Bronze Star, a prestigious American decoration for acts of heroism, merit, or meritorious service in a combat zone.

When LCol Pat Stogran heard things were going wrong with Operation ANACONDA, he had the 3 PPCLI staff work out contingency plans to move the battle group or parts of it up to Shah-i-Kot. Could the Coyote squadron drive there? Would the toboggan groups with their medical supplies and heaters be useful? What would it take to get the battle group to Bagram? Then, on 5 March, Col Wiercinski called and asked if 3 PPCLI could air assault into the Naka Valley to draw off enemy reinforcements and disrupt further movement to the east towards Pakistan.⁸⁹

That option, however, was vetoed by the Canadian commander in Tampa in what was seen by the Canadian leadership in Afghanistan as a risk-averse decision. Instead, a decision was made to use 3 PPCLI to sweep and clear the Whale feature. An American battalion was to fly in and take up the positions around KAF while 3 PPCLI deployed to Bagram Air Field by C-130 Hercules. The initial plan was to have two battalions air assault onto the Whale feature, but this was later reduced to two PPCLI companies and an American company brought in from Kuwait – A Company from 4-31st Infantry. 3 PPCLI was cut from TF Rakkasan to a brigade they had not worked with before: 2nd Brigade from the 10th Mountain Division. This phase was called Operation HARPOON.⁹⁰

The problem was this: what exactly was 3 PPCLI supposed to do? LCol Stogran could not get anything more specific other than “kill Al Qaeda” from Col Kevin Wilkerson, who commanded 2nd Brigade. After some time, the 3 PPCLI staff was able to get some definition on their mission. There was an estimated 80 to 100 Al Qaeda fighters in the cave complexes on the Whale. 3 PPCLI with attachments would air assault, sweep the Whale feature, and conduct sensitive site exploitation on anything the enemy left behind. The FSG made the necessary preparations to move all three companies, plus the battalion headquarters, to Bagram. Recce Squadron, 12 Field Squadron, and the FSG continued with KAF protection tasks.⁹¹

On 10 March 2002, 3 PPCLI moved to Bagram, but a lack of CH-47 lift delayed the insertion. There was some uncertainty as to what the Patricia's could expect on The Whale. It was an extremely rugged mountain with a ‘spine’ that ran northeast to southwest, re-entrants, ravines, and drop-offs; there was broken rock everywhere. It would take time to comb it and ensure that there were no stay-behind enemy forces or equipment caches. Anticipation and expectations were high – this was potentially the first major fight for the Canadian Army since the Korean War 50 years ago. The troops were pumped up as they waited, and American chaplains dispensed absolution and blessed the helicopters.⁹²

The flight took a little over an hour. At 0712Z hours on 13 March, the first Chinooks touched down on The Whale, and the Patricias poured off the ramps. The landing zone was on the northeast portion. B Company faced east and north, while A and C Companies moved in parallel along the western face of the mountain. Recce Platoon and the American infantry company proceeded along the ‘spine.’ In time, some U.S. Special Forces and Afghan militia arrived.⁹³ (See Figure 2-5)

It was slow going, as each re-entrant had to be cleared. Some troops were carrying in excess of 100 lbs of equipment, and the Whale was at high altitude. Hydration was a problem. So was the American infantry company, who ignored direction, charged forward in expectation of meeting engagements, and then criticized their Canadian counterparts

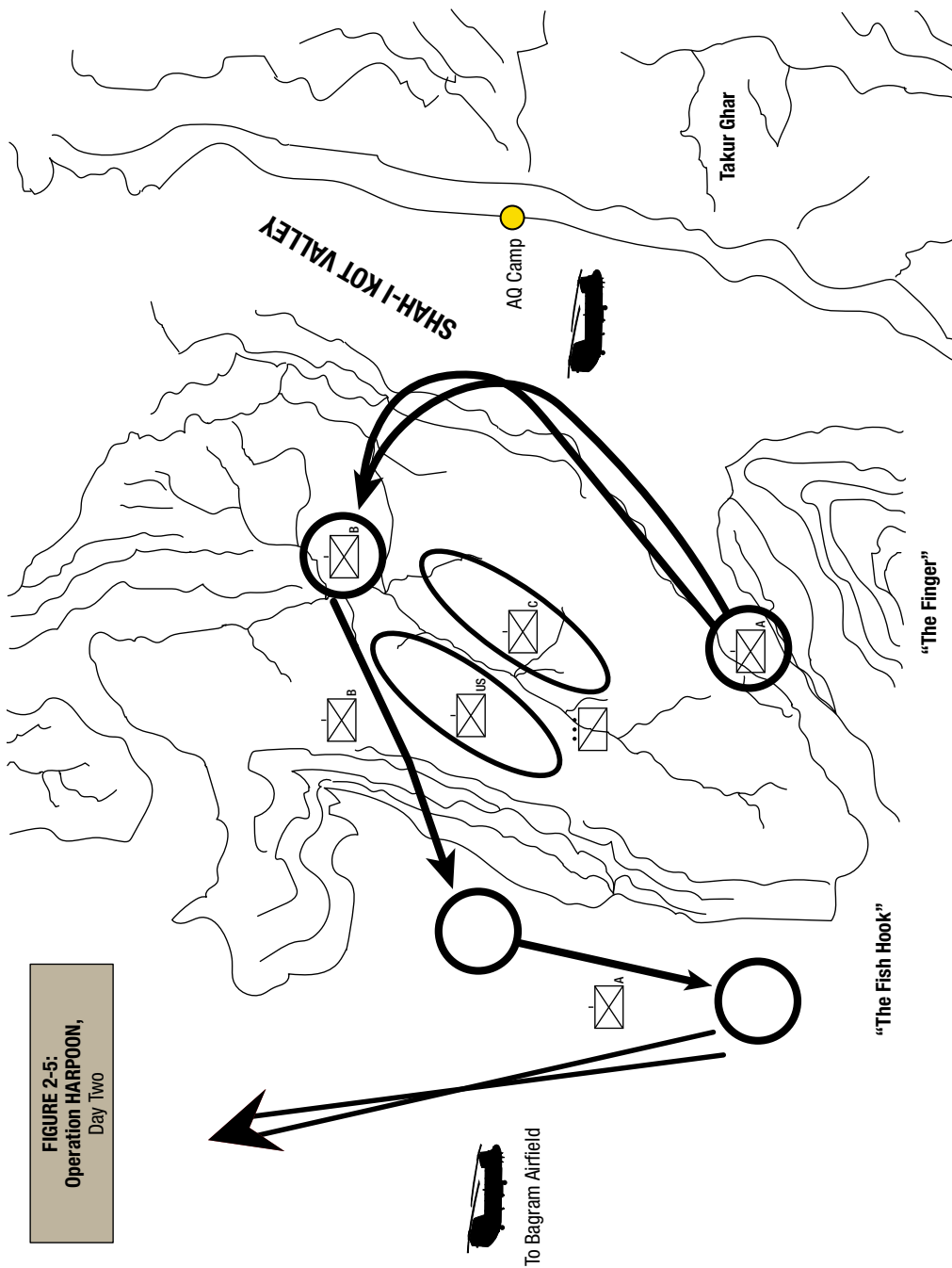


Figure 2-5: Operation HARPOON, Day Two

for moving too slowly. The only shooting came from this sub-unit when they engaged two of the enemy, one of whom was already wounded. For the rest of day one, A Company moved down the mountain to check out what turned out to be an ammo cache and then explored a number of caves, while C continued along the southern part of the ‘spine.’ Some documents, corpses, and discarded equipment were found in various locations.⁹⁴



Photo Credit: DND APD02 5000-152

Operation HARPOON, part of Operation ANACONDA, was conducted at high altitude. Hazards included dehydration, to which some members of the American 10th Mountain Division accompanying the Canadians succumbed.

On day two, A Company was picked up by CH-47, and re-inserted onto the Whale’s ‘spine’. B Company crossed over to the north face and made its way southwest, picking its way through the broken terrain, searching every outcrop and sangar. After a grueling hike, a small village was sighted at the base of the north face: B and A Companies moved in to check it out but there was no contact. Again, documents and equipment were discovered but no large caches were uncovered. The original Naka Valley contingency plan was dusted off, but ANACONDA was winding down and there was no more need for that manoeuvre. 3 PPCLI and the American company consolidated and then were extracted by helicopter and flown back to Bagram on 18 March.⁹⁵

Despite the lack of contact, later analysis concluded that Operation HARPOON gave impetus to the remaining enemy on the Whale to avoid 3 PPCLI and move south. TF 64, the Australian SAS, lay in wait in hides and called in air support on any enemy they saw trying to move south of the blocking positions or to the east. An estimated 200 enemy personnel were killed by TF 64 in their area of operations.⁹⁶

A follow-on operation, MOUNTAIN LION, was mounted at the end of March 2002 into the Zhawar Kili training camp complex. This involved SOF and TF 1-187 in a sensitive site exploitation mission but the operation was handled from Bagram and did not involve the 3 PPCLI Battle Group.⁹⁷

Blue on Blue: The Tarnak Farms Tragedy

On 17 April 2002, two U.S. Air Force F-16 Falcon fighter-bombers from the 170th Fighter Squadron, callsigns COFFEE 51 and COFFEE 52, took off from Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait, at 1520Z. Later, they rendezvoused with a tanker aircraft, refueled, and headed for southern Afghanistan. Maj William Umbach and Maj Harry Schmidt's mission was to provide close air support for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces as required. Their F-16 aircraft were equipped with LITENING II targeting pods, 20mm cannons and GBU-12 500-lb bombs for that purpose.⁹⁸

Orbiting near KAF after a multi-hour transit, COFFEE 51 and COFFEE 52 saw the flashes of small arms fire south of the base and they decided to attack at 2121Z.⁹⁹ Two-and-a-half miles away from the target, the F-16s manoeuvred. The two pilots synchronized their data links so they could look at the target simultaneously. They confirmed that their lasers were synchronized. The GBU-12 hit at 2126Z.

What Umbach and Schmidt saw was in fact Maj Sean Hackett's A Company at the Tarnak Farms range complex conducting a live-fire exercise. A Company was preparing to deploy to Khost on Operation WHITE FOX and refresher training on night firing techniques was required. A Company soldiers were aligned north to south along a drainage ditch firing west across the open terrain, whose only features were a riddled tank target and a circular mud-walled corral.

Grainy imagery from the targeting pod shows the GBU-12 landing amidst a 10-man infantry section, specifically on a cluster of three men – Cpl Ainsworth Dyer, MCpl Curtis Hollister, and Sgt Marc Léger. The bomb landed right next to Léger.¹⁰⁰ The blast killed four Canadians – Dyer, Léger, Pte Richard Green and Pte Nathan Smith – and wounded eight others.

The men of A Company assisted their wounded comrades immediately, believing there had been a weapons malfunction. Three medics dove in and worked on the wounded. One of the medics, Cpl Jean de la Bourdonnaye, worked on a severely injured Sgt Lorne Ford: his actions saved Ford's leg from amputation. A U.S. Army MEDEVAC UH-60 was called in to evacuate

the most seriously wounded, while a Recce Squadron Bison and two Coyote vehicles deployed to recover the other wounded to the hospital at KAF. Severely wounded Canadians were evacuated by US Air Force C-17 to the hospital in Landstuhl, Germany for further treatment.¹⁰¹

What had gone wrong? Conducted in an emotionally charged and highly politicized atmosphere, several legal and disciplinary processes converged to depict in some detail a sequence of events that involved flawed institutional procedures and personal shortcomings. Fundamentally, when all was said and done, there were several reasons why Maj Schmidt dropped a GBU-12 on A Company.

First, the Mission Planning Cell at the 170th Fighter Squadron had removed the Tarnak Farms range complex restricted operating zone from the briefing package given to the pilots. A restricted operating zone is established in every area where friendly forces are operating in order to alert pilots of the presence of those forces and ensure they exercise caution. The Board of Inquiry concluded that the 170th's briefing process and its software were deficient in that "the volume of information is often unmanageable and can lead to confusion" and that "all information on the airspace below 10 000 feet above ground level was intentionally removed from the mission data given to the aircrew in order to simplify the information provided in their mass brief and flight maps." Schmidt and Umbach did not know where friendly forces were operating around the airfield. Likewise, the airborne warning and control system crew was operating with a similarly simplified data set that did not depict the restricted operating zone.¹⁰²

Those facts alone were disturbing, but not as disturbing as the discrepancies between what Umbach and Schmidt later said was happening and what the data showed at the time. If there was such a threat to the flight, then why did the pilots not leave the area at speed, re-assess, and then conduct a more deliberate attack? Terms such as "routine," "relaxed" and "casual" were used by the board of inquiry when describing the behaviour of the pilots and their aircraft. That is not the behaviour of men who perceived themselves to be in mortal danger. Defensive systems like chaff or flares were not employed. One observer noted that Schmidt "exacerbated the situation by his manoeuvring and would have forced himself into a self-defence situation...had there been a real threat."¹⁰³

The idea that a multiple-launch rocket system like a BM-21 was a threat to F-16 aircraft was nothing short of absurd. The Board of Inquiry concluded that Schmidt "did not recognize the observed ground fire event as a surface-to-surface training exercise.... This failure of perception was the initiating factor that started the ensuing sequence of missed cues and hasty, imprudent actions that led to the premature release of the weapon. Expectation appears to have played a significant role...."¹⁰⁴ That was the polite way of saying that Maj Schmidt wanted to engage something, anything, that appeared to be shooting at him, regardless of the circumstances.

Two soldiers would be commended for their actions in the wake of the Tarnak Farms tragedy. WO “Billy” Bolen and WO Keith Jones received the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation for their professionalism and humanitarianism in the period immediately after the misplaced airstrike on A Company.¹⁰⁵

Put in historical context, the Tarnak Farms incident pales in comparison to the bombing of Canadian front lines in Normandy in August 1944 by American and Canadian air forces – two ‘friendly fire’ incidents that killed around 250 Canadians and wounded nearly 500.¹⁰⁶ However, the fact that the only Canadian deaths and injuries incurred during the course of 2002 were generated by American forces and not by the enemy, combined with the potential for this incident to activate anti-American sentiment in Canada with subsequent negative effects on public support for the mission, were major factors in how the government and the Canadian Forces responded to the tragedy: with a massive display of public remembrance. The circumstances demanded a response that appeared to be disproportionate. This was, in complete contrast to the way lethal incidents were handled by the Canadian Forces during the United Nations Protection Force period in the 1990s, where ramp ceremonies were not held and public awareness was actively discouraged. Canadian Forces personnel were murdered in ambushes and wounded by snipers, mortared by belligerent forces, and declared casualties of ‘accidents.’¹⁰⁷ The response to the Tarnak Farms tragedy eventually heightened expectations vis-à-vis the public profile of repatriation ceremonies and in the investigative approach to Canadian incidents and deaths on the battlefield for years to come.

Operation TORII: Towr Ghar, May 2002

The Towr Ghar (“Black Dust”) region of Nangarhar province, part of the Tora Bora mountain range, is easily one of the most forbidding and rugged areas in Afghanistan. Any examination of the eastern part of the country using overhead imagery reveals that Tora Bora immediately stands out as a dark strip, looking like the hull of a sailing ship with the prow at the Khyber Pass and the stern nearly at Kabul. To the north are fertile areas on the plains around Jalalabad; south of the mountains lies the city of Parachinar in Kurram, Pakistan, one of the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies. The FATA constitute Pakistan’s ‘wild west’, where central government control is minimal to non-existent. In December 2001, Towr Ghar became the scene of intense coalition activity. Dubbed ‘The Battle of Tora Bora’ by the media, ENDURING FREEDOM forces engaged significant Al Qaeda forces in the mountains and, in doing so, came close to capturing or killing Osama bin Laden. (See Figure 2-3)

Information indicated that bin Laden pulled out of Kabul in November 2001 and headed for Jalalabad, where he tried to rally local people to support Al Qaeda. Failing to do so, he and his entourage retreated south into the Tora Bora Mountains sometime in late November or early December. U.S. Special Forces reconnaissance and observation teams were inserted on 5 December north of Towr Ghar, while two anti-Taliban Afghan leaders assembled and deployed their militias in what proved to be an impossible attempt to surround the region. On 14 December, an American JSOC team spotted the entourage, and American aircraft bombed the area over the course of three hours. No more transmissions from the area were made by bin Laden after 14 December.¹⁰⁸

Coalition and Afghan operations continued until the Towr Ghar region was cleared of Al Qaeda fighters. Some 200 enemy bodies were recovered but exactly how many were entombed in the caves and bunkers or fragmented by the bombing will never be known.¹⁰⁹

A group of intelligence analysts at Bagram Air Field went back through archived material sometime in March 2002 and re-examined what they thought had happened. They developed a theory that bin Laden had been killed in the Towr Ghar, and they even came up with a likely location.¹¹⁰ Confirming bin Laden's death held several advantages. First, it would permit resources to be focused on other high value targets. Second, it would prevent, as the analysts put it so succinctly, "chasing Osama bin Laden 'Elvis sightings' for years." Finally, it would demonstrate Operation ENDURING FREEDOM success and provide an information operations victory. Even if the body was not found, the chances that other Al Qaeda information was buried in the area – laptops, communications equipment and papers, for example – would be useful. The downside was that there would be criticism if nothing were found, particularly if the media overhyped the operation.¹¹¹

There were also growing indicators in Jalalabad that the enemy was going to mount a guerrilla warfare campaign or some form of uprising in the province. Going back to Towr Ghar in force would contribute to the deterrent effort along the border, send a message to target audiences in Jalalabad province, and assist with confirmation of bin Laden's demise.¹¹²

3 PPCLI Battle Group was tasked to lead the sensitive site exploitation mission. The air movements' phase of the operation from KAF to Bagram Air Field built on the template established during Operation HARPOON. Seven C-130s were allocated to move A and C Company, Combat Support Company, Battalion HQ, 12 Field Squadron, materiel and supplies to Bagram, where the battle group was reorganized for the airmobile insertion into Towr Ghar and its targeted objectives.¹¹³

The first lift took off at 0043 hours on 4 May 2002 in U.S. Army CH-47 Chinooks from the 7-101st Aviation Regiment, escorted by AH-64 Apache attack helicopters from the 3-101st Aviation Regiment. A variety of U.S. Air Force F-16 and A-10 ground attack aircraft were 'stacked' overhead in case they were required. A clutch of Apaches flew ahead

for the formation, closely observing the ground with their sensor systems on the way into the landing zones. The flight from Bagram Air Field was without incident and the helicopters flew through the forbidding black and white peaks of Tora Bora at low level to reduce their vulnerability to ground fire.

At 0130 hours, the first lift was on the ground at Landing Zones EAGLE and LOON. Lift 2 followed at 0430 hours. There was no contact and the only casualty was a knee injury sustained as one of the soldiers disembarked. A Company secured EAGLE and immediately struck out to recce FREZENBERG and SOMME to the west, while C Company secured LOON for lift 2 and conducted a visual assessment of KAPYONG. The mortar teams set up their tubes in their firing positions, while Recce Platoon moved off to establish observation posts on the high ground. The snipers struck out on their own to do the same. In a very short time, the battle group had over-watch on both objectives DIFENSA and CAMINO, again with no contact. All was quiet again once the Chinooks thumped off back to Bagram Air Field. The only sounds were the odd shouted command and the distant engine noise of AH-64 Apaches as they orbited Objective FREDERICK.¹¹⁴ The Signals section under Capt Eric McFee had to adjust the communications plan quickly since the mountainous terrain interfered with transmissions. Building on the Operation HARPOON experience, all of the sub-units acted as relay nodes throughout the course of the operation. It was not unusual to have an infantry section relay between battle group and company, for example, or have battle group HQ relay between two platoons. Those procedures 'pushed' the radio signals into the nooks and crannies, which usually produced attenuating 'shadow.'¹¹⁵

12 Field Squadron's engineers moved onto the KAPYONG underground facility, while the battle group searched in vain for Objective VIMY. Three 40-pound Beehive explosives and a tri-grain were used to blast an eight-foot deep hole in an attempt to find a way in, to no avail. Recce Platoon discovered two clusters of seven bunkers in the A Company area, while A Company searched for a way into FREZENBERG. LCol Stogran reported at the end of the first day that:

The attacks on the cave entrances sealed them to the point of being indiscernible. Exploitation will focus on the best guess as to exactly where the entrances are and employing demolitions to make an opening. At this point doing an engineer assessment on plant that might be useful would be, at best a [Silly Wild Ass Guess] unless the intention is to carry out a major excavation of the sites....¹¹⁶



Photo Credit: DND AP2002-5414

Originally dubbed Operation BLACK DEVIL by 3 PPCLI Battle Group, more politically correct staff elsewhere insisted on a name change. Operation TORII proceeded in May into the Towr Ghar Mountains in a bid to determine whether Osama bin Laden met his fate there – or not, as it turned out.

Contact with local people, however, started to pay off. Several villagers told Canadian troops that Osama bin Laden was not there; he had been extracted by helicopter and taken to Pakistan sometime during or after the battle in December 2001. The most important piece of information from local people, however, was the presence of 24 Al Qaeda graves southeast of KAPYONG, between the nearby villages of Merkhan and Alefkehl, and other reports that a tall, thin Arab man was interred there among them.¹¹⁷ The bodies came from the valley where KAPYONG was located and were transported from there to the graveyard at Alefkehl for burial. Personnel learned that pilgrims walked to this site all the way from Pakistan to pray. Apparently, they believed that praying at a martyr's grave would cure diseases and ailments.¹¹⁸

LCol Stogran tasked Maj Bob Ford to lead the exploitation team. This included 3 Platoon from C Company, a half engineer section from 12 Field Squadron, an intelligence officer, U.S. Army Criminal Investigative Division investigators, and elements from JSOC.¹¹⁹ Three graves were selected based on the elaborateness of the piled rock coverings and flag array. Afghans place the deceased, wrapped in a shroud, into a hole carved out of the ground three or four feet deep. The hole is usually lined with wood or stones. The hole is protected by a cap of either wood or rock, with a rock pile placed on top of the cap. There are headers and footers for the rock pile, which are typically aligned north-south. *Shahid*, or martyrs' graves, are usually highly decorated with colourful flags.¹²⁰ Two sets of exhumations were conducted by the team: three on 5 May, and seventeen on 6 May.

A Canadian observer described the exhumation process:

The infantry began uncovering the graves ensuring to keep a record of how each grave was marked, as we had to replace each grave exactly as we had found them. Once the markings were removed and recorded we began to excavate the graves. We dug until we hit the top of the cap that covered the bodies. Once all of the dirt was removed an engineer would pull the wood with the rope ensuring the area was clear before doing so. Once the cap was cleared of booby traps it was removed exposing the body. We then checked the body with the mine detector for any abnormal large metal objects. Once satisfied the contacts were zippers, belt buckles and normal things the rope was tied around the ankles of the bodies and the body pulled up from the grave. The CID [personnel] then did their DNA gathering...Once complete we returned the bodies to grave as they were found and the cap replaced and the graves returned to the way we had found them. We performed this on twenty grave sites.¹²¹

Local people were consulted during the process to ensure that the exhumations were conducted with as much dignity as the situation permitted. The community leaders in Merkhan and Alefkehl understood the nature of the operation and did not protest or oppose it.¹²²

The exhumations uncovered 23 “mostly whole” bodies. The faces were unrecognizable because of the mummification process. There were no documents or equipment. Hair samples were taken. It appeared to the team that this was probably Osama bin Laden’s close protection party.¹²³

Despite repeated demolitions, no trace of the cave entrances could be found. Patrols found nothing to exploit in the objective areas. Local people were able to confirm that the TORII force was working in areas where caves had been located before the bombing and that rock overhangs had been dropped on two of the openings by the December bombing. Maj Rod Keller from 12 Field Squadron recommended that a future mission use seismic exploration equipment to locate the caves first before excavations were attempted.¹²⁴

Consequently, the decision was made to withdraw from Towr Ghar. On 7 May 2002, the first wave of six CH-47s arrived at landing zones LOON, EAGLE, and FALCON to start the extraction at 0300Z. Op TORII ended without incident with the force returning to Bagram Air Field and then back to Kandahar by C-130. Five years later, special operations forces launched into Tora Bora once again, believing that Osama bin Laden may have returned for a last stand, but that operation turned up nothing.¹²⁵

Operation WHITE FOX: Khost, April-May 2002

In April 2002, 3 PPCLI was asked by TF Rakkasan to prepare an infantry company for deployment to the Khost region to protect a former Soviet base that coalition special forces were now operating from. Khost was geographically important in many ways. It lay 50 miles southeast of Kabul and was 20 miles from Pakistan. Khost City and Chapman Air Field sat in what was known as the 'Khost Bowl,' a large, fertile valley surrounded on all sides by wooded mountains. The only highway in was used to connect Khost to the critical garrison city of Gardez, which controlled Highway 1, running from Kabul to Qalat in Zabul province and then to Kandahar City. The Khost Bowl was a natural fortress and a potential sanctuary area. A significant coalition presence in the area was critical in order to deny that sanctuary area to enemy forces, and, in the early days, block Taliban and Al Qaeda forces retreating south from Kabul. (See Figure 2-3)

Chapman Air Field near Khost was generally used as a logistical support and staging base by the coalition for special operations because of its proximity to the mountainous regions along the Durand Line. When B Company arrived, a Special Forces Operational Detachment B was in place with a communications detachment from the 112th Signal Battalion. The ODB serviced a number of Operational Detachment Alphas operating in the province, including teams from the 2-19 Special Forces working with AMF and teams from 7th and later 3rd Special Forces who were stabilizing the region. A special forces safe house was situated in Khost city itself to give a local 'foot on the ground' to the teams.¹²⁶

That was the military geography. The social geography was equally important. In the early days of the war, the CIA attempted to form the Eastern Alliance out of tribal elements in the region. The so-called Eastern Alliance was supposed to be a Pashtun equivalent to the Northern Alliance, and substantial resources were deployed to get those elements to either stop being neutral or to switch sides.¹²⁷ There was limited success in that endeavour. Pashtuns are not Tajiks, nor are they Uzbeks, and the Northern Alliance had been fighting together for some years. That said, we have already seen with Operations HARPOON and TORII that CIA and U.S. Special Forces had developed relations with the region's Pashtun tribes to varying effect.

The issue in early 2002, then, was who would control what territory and what relationship would exist between those tribal power brokers and the emergent Afghan Interim Administration under Hamid Karzai. The volatility of the governance arrangements in and around Khost had significant ramifications at these higher levels and thus on the stability of post-Taliban Afghanistan. It was this complex milieu that formed the background to the deployment of B Company, 3 PPCLI, in April-May 2002 to Chapman Air Field. In a smaller analogy to the battle group's situation at KAF, it was about guarding an airfield at one level, and it was about local and provincial stability on another. And, as before, the high value target hunt was superimposed on both.

In late January 2002, fighting between armed Pashtun groups was reported in Gardez. In early February, one faction was driven from Gardez with a reported 50 people killed. This prompted a closer examination of the situation by CENTCOM. When the appropriate resources were focused on the problem, details of the complex internecine conflict emerged. Khost had not always been a province and, in the past, had been an administrative division of Paktia province. The Pashtuns in the area did not necessarily go along with those arrangements, though some did when it benefitted them. Hamid Karzai, in his role as leader of the Afghan Interim Administration, designated Pacha Khan Zadran as the governor of Paktia province. Pacha Khan Zadran's brother, Amanullah Khan, was at this time the new Minister for Tribal and Border Areas in the Afghan Interim Administration. Pacha Khan Zadran, whose militias were supported by the CIA and U.S. Special Forces, had his power base in Khost, where his half-brother Kamal Khan Zadran held sway with his own militia forces.¹²⁸

When Pacha Khan Zadran moved to Gardez to take up the governorship, the Gardez Shura led by Haji Saifullah (a man associated with the Rabbani faction in the 1980s) refused to accept him, in part because he was from Paktika and not Paktia province, in part because of revenge issues relating to the civil war in 1992, and also possibly because the Gardez Shura had poor relations with Kamal Khan Zadran in Khost.¹²⁹ To complicate matters further, Kamal Khan Zadran did not get along with Zakim Khan Zadran, who also had a militia force stationed in Khost. Indeed, in addition to the power dynamics, there were issues related to land ownership records held in Gardez that related to Khost and who controlled the timber industry in hills surrounding Khost City.¹³⁰

This exceedingly volatile situation was, according to analysts, being stimulated by Jalaluddin Haqqani of the Haqqani Tribal Network, a cross-border Pashtun group allied to Al Qaeda. The analysts believed that "Al Qaeda is deliberately manipulating conflict between Pacha Khan Zadran and the Gardez Shura to weaken the Afghan Interim Administration and discredit the Afghan peace process." It was believed that Al Qaeda had infiltrated both factions and was encouraging them to go at each other.¹³¹ The effects of that dissention may or may not have negatively affected AMF support to Operation ANACONDA.¹³²

In addition to the drama over who would be governor in Gardez, infighting between Kamal Khan and Zakim Khan in Khost and the attempted assassination of the Khost security chief ramped up tensions in the city.¹³³ Those problems deflected special operations forces resources to the point where OEF had to admit that tribal infighting was interfering with the hunt for Al Qaeda leadership targets: Ayman Al-Zawahiri was believed to be hiding in the Khost province in the surrounding mountains along the border.¹³⁴ Indeed, on 19 March 2002, enemy forces conducted a significant raid on Chapman Air Field, which was barely held back by the special forces logisticians and signalers based there.¹³⁵

The situation was bad enough to warrant the deployment of a squadron of British special operations forces and two U.S. Special Forces ODBs and their associated ODAs at the end of March to Chapman Air Field.¹³⁶

Tensions remained high throughout April 2002.¹³⁷ Several incidents involving rockets or mortars occurred, while reports came in that command-detonated mines were being laid on the roads and that Al Qaeda was recruiting in refugee camps in Pakistan to mount operations against the airfield.¹³⁸

Meanwhile, back in Kandahar, Maj Mike Blackburn's B Company had just relinquished its range time to Maj Sean Hackett's A Company as A Company had been tapped for the Khost deployment. After the Tarnak Farms tragedy, B Company was given the task, while A Company recovered and the remainder of the battle group prepared for Operation TORII.¹³⁹

The mission as assigned by TF Rakkasan was "to secure a FOB for SOF/OGA forces to enable SOF/OGA operations" in the areas of operations surrounding Khost. There was no detail as to how B Company was to accomplish this, which caused issues later. Company D from 1-187 Infantry would essentially climb on board the helicopters that brought in B Company. The 3 PPCLI staff fleshed it out as much as possible: B Company was to "approach the defensive task in a dynamic and aggressive manner (irregular defence routine, covert surveillance, limited perimeter patrols, etc.) thus keeping potential enemy unhinged and deterred."¹⁴⁰

B Company was cut down for Operation WHITE FOX because of the limited availability of helicopter lift due to ongoing operations. There were two platoons, a forward operation officer, a medic, and an engineer section from 12 Field Squadron. Maj Blackburn was assigned an American communications specialist so that interoperability could be maintained. In addition, B Company, working with 3-101 Military Police Company, became proficient with the M-19 automatic grenade launcher system and other American weapons like the AT-4. Canadian soldiers discovered that there were many, many extra American systems lying around KAF in crates. When asked if the Canadians could borrow them, the TF Rakkasan quartermaster's unhesitating response was, "Sure. How much ammo do you want?"¹⁴¹

The insertion onto Chapman Air Field was conducted by CH-47 transports escorted by AH-64 attack helicopters on 20 April 2002. When B Company ran off the back ramps, they could see a ramshackle sandbagged control 'tower' with the sign "Chapman Air Field, elevation 3775 feet" on its plywood side. In the distance, on the other side of the 9 000-foot runway, lay the carcasses of 10 or so tan and green-painted Antonov 32 planes. The main road ran west to Khost city, which was about 3 kilometres away. A wadi ran parallel to the runway, about two kilometres away to the south. A mountain range formed the backdrop, again to the south.¹⁴²

On arrival, B Company discovered that Chapman Air Field housed not only the Special Forces Operational Detachment B, but also an Other Government Agency detachment and signals intelligence collection assets. In addition to being a logistics support facility, the base was an intelligence collector as well.¹⁴³ The initial transport issues were solved by the U.S. Special Forces ODB, which was able to secure a number of Toyota Hilux pickup trucks for B Company's use. There were also two AMF organizations at Chapman Air Field, led by different AMF commanders. The Canadians dubbed them 'The Polypro Brigade' because of the underwear given to them by the U.S. Special Forces, and the 'Tank and Artillery Brigade.' The Tank and Artillery Brigade had 12 people living in a shack who manned a handful of rusting T-55s, a 152mm gun, a 122mm gun, and what looked like a 100mm anti-tank gun. There were some 'police' on the road outside the airfield, but it was not clear who they belonged to, as they were not wearing police uniforms.¹⁴⁴

The immediate problem for Maj Blackburn and B Company was this: where exactly did 'security' for Chapman Air Field begin? At the wire? On the runway? At the tower? The orders were vague. There were no coordinating instructions to govern B Company's relationship to what amounted to several types of special operations forces, intelligence agencies, and Afghan militias that were linked to a complex political environment. The Americans had coordinating problems themselves between what they called 'Big Army' and the special forces world. The right hand usually did not know what the left hand was doing. Where did the Chapman Air Field force's area of operations stop and the U.S. Special Forces area of operations start? That was not clear.¹⁴⁵

That state of affairs did not prevent B Company from seizing the initiative and applying some semblance of order to a confusing situation. The first move was to assess the defensive measure that already existed. B Company now had to liaise with three separate Afghan militia groups, with no interpreter! It was not clear what factions they belonged to. Consequently, engaging the Afghan militias was a force protection exercise at that level. From time to time, rockets were fired at Chapman, which prompted collective action from the Canadians, Afghans, and Americans to hunt and deter the rocketeers.¹⁴⁶

Then there was the matter of coordinating firepower to defend the airfield from external assault. The last thing anybody needed was a rag-tag tank crew randomly loosing off 100mm rounds. B Company had brought 60mm mortars, machine guns and M-19 grenade launchers with them. Working with the Tank and Artillery Brigade, they were able to formulate a target matrix so that any direct fire or indirect fire threat to the airfield could be engaged using a combination of Canadian, American, and Afghan systems. Maj Blackburn immediately initiated a nighttime illumination programme to generate a psychological effect on any potential enemy. The Afghan militias were enthusiastic and on occasion, they surprised the Canadians with their creative use of worn-out ex-Soviet equipment.¹⁴⁷

Over the course of the next two months, B Company maintained the security of this vital facility, not only from the Taliban and Al Qaeda but also from the tribal instability that was growing in Khost. Aggressive patrolling, reorganization of existing defensive stores and resources, and coordinating between the array of forces stationed at the site were the primary tasks undertaken, to great effect. When B Company, as good Canadian soldiers will, started to push the security bubble out more and more, they were yanked back by higher Canadian headquarters and told to stay at the field itself until an American infantry company rotating in would relieve them. Like the KAF security task, Operation WHITE FOX facilitated crucial operations that were conducted in a vital but volatile province.¹⁴⁸

Contingency Plan PYTHON

In the aftermath of Operation ANACONDA, Operation TORII, and the series of border operations around Khost in March 2002, it appeared as though there were no more large concentrations of Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in eastern and southern Afghanistan. More attention was placed on hunting down the leaders of the deposed Taliban regime in an effort to pre-empt their publicly stated plans to mount an insurgency against the coalition and the emergent interim administration.¹⁴⁹ The primary targets included Mullah Omar, Mullah Baradar, and Mullah Osmani, but there were other ‘persons of interest,’ including Mullah Rafiq, the Taliban leader who directed the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Hazaras back in the late 1990s.¹⁵⁰

The task of tracking and apprehending or killing those leaders in southern Afghanistan belonged to the intelligence and special operations apparatus based at KAF. As better information came in while coalition forces expanded operations in the region, the number of special reconnaissance and direct action missions associated with hunting Taliban leadership significantly increased by April 2002.

On 17 March, a direct action mission into Mullah Omar’s hometown of Sangsar in Zharey district west of Kandahar City netted thirty Taliban, but no Mullah Omar. These prisoners were processed at facilities in KAF.¹⁵¹ Another direct action mission on 24 March made a play for Osmani, but with no success.¹⁵² More ‘pieces’ of the Taliban ‘puzzle’ were gained either through exploitation missions or from intelligence sources that reported after each raid, and that in turn assisted in continuing operations. On 20 April, a SOF team attempted to get Taliban leader Mullah Bismillah at a house in the northern part of the city. Bismillah was organizing a Taliban ‘stay behind’ cell. The team killed one Taliban operative and seized weapons, communications equipment, and documents. Bismillah was not home.¹⁵³

How exactly did this affect the 3 PPCLI Battle Group? The possibility that these direct action and sensitive site exploitation missions might run into trouble was very real. The best portrayal of a failed direct action mission is *Black Hawk Down*. This 2001 film depicts the myriad of problems encountered by a special operations task force while hunting leaders in Somalia during the 1993 humanitarian intervention. The most important takeaway from that operation for any professional observer was the need for a responsive, properly equipped conventional QRF that could rescue the direct action force if it encountered forces or situations it was not equipped to deal with. The increase in operational tempo for special operations forces working out of KAF prompted a closer examination of what role 3 PPCLI Battle Group might play in the event that special operations forces requested support in a situation similar to that encountered in Somalia.

Kandahar City was under a certain level of control by the Sherzai family and its associated Barakzai AMF. However, those forces could not indefinitely keep order in a city of a half a million people. It would take some time to establish a government with its associated services. Until that was done, the Sherzai AMF and its assistants from the 19th SFGA occupied a number of key sites inside the city from which they sortied when required. A loose network of checkpoints existed but without any serious command and control. Not all city districts were anti-Taliban. If the enemy leaders or facilitators were ensconced in a pro-Taliban neighbourhood, a situation like that encountered by JSOC in Mogadishu could occur.¹⁵⁴

It was also possible that a Taliban force might attack some of the coalition-controlled sites in the city. These pieces of key terrain included the governor's guesthouse where Gul Agha Sherzai presided from, the central police station, the governor's palace, and the UN or other aid agencies that were starting to arrive. Special operations forces also controlled Mullah Omar's former residence, now FOB Ghecko, located on the northwest side of the city. A QRF from KAF might have to conduct a rescue operation if any of the sites were threatened or besieged by enemy forces, demonstrations, or other violence.

The Brigade QRF 'package' was based on the forces required to conduct an airmobile extraction using CH-47s. But what if the helicopters were busy elsewhere or the weather deteriorated? Contingency Plan PYTHON was developed by the 3 PPCLI staff to create a ground option that had six Coyotes, three Bisons carrying an infantry platoon, and a Nyala engineer vehicle prepared to extract special forces personnel from the city as required.¹⁵⁵

The 3 PPCLI Battle Group was prepared to deploy the Contingency Plan PYTHON QRF on a number of occasions. On 9 May 2002, a SOF raid inside the city detained 13 insurgents with weapons and seized a number of laptops.¹⁵⁶ Another direct action on 21 May within the city netted two more detainees and more information.¹⁵⁷ That in turn led to another direct action, which apprehended a commander named Sardar Mohammad

on 6 June.¹⁵⁸ A substantial raid mounted by 19th Special Forces and their associated Afghan militia targeted three houses on 9 June and produced even more data for the intelligence system at KAF.¹⁵⁹ There was no significant local reaction during the course of any of these operations, and PYTHON did not have to be activated.

Outside the city, forces from TF K-Bar mounted operations in Maywand district. Around 20 May, New Zealand and Canadian SOF raided a series of compounds and detained a significant number of people. Not all of these detainees were Taliban insurgents, which annoyed local people who in turn conducted a demonstration at the front gates of KAF. This was the first time that coalition forces saw a symbiotic relationship between operations in the field and backlash by the population. Again, this was a potential threat to KAF operations and had to be taken seriously by the protection forces, though it was suspected that local power brokers instigated the demonstration for their own political and/or economic agendas.¹⁶⁰ LCol Stogran and his staff took note of this phenomenon, which eventually served the battle group in good stead later.

Operation FULL THROTTLE

In May 2002, a special forces operations team based in the upper Helmand valley received information that there was Taliban activity in the remote Deh Rawod area of western Oruzgan province. Deh Rawod was known to be Mullah Omar's childhood home and it was possible that he might seek sanctuary there. Indicators that Mullah Omar, Mullah Osmani, and Mullah Baradar were all in the region entered the intelligence system. In time, Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) resources confirmed that there was unusual communications traffic in the same area. If accurate, it would be possible to mount an operation in order to completely decapitate the remaining Taliban command structure.¹⁶¹ (See Figure 2-6)

Special reconnaissance by Norwegian, German, Australian, and Canadian teams helped get a better sense of what was going on in the valley. There was a significant amount of activity, far too much for a remote area. One team heard mortars being test fired. ISTAR reportage all pointed to an area just northeast of the town itself that appeared to be a command node.¹⁶²

A subsequent operation in June 2002 involved a mix of Norwegian SOF (NORSOF) and a 12-man ODA from 3rd Special Forces Group. The concept was to insert the special reconnaissance teams from NORSOF, and then use the ODA and Afghans to "shake the tree." The NORSOF team was compromised and all hell broke loose as the enemy engaged them. The collectors heard heavy traffic coming from sites around Deh Rawod. Tactical SIGINT uncovered a network of observation posts, also located on the high ground.¹⁶³

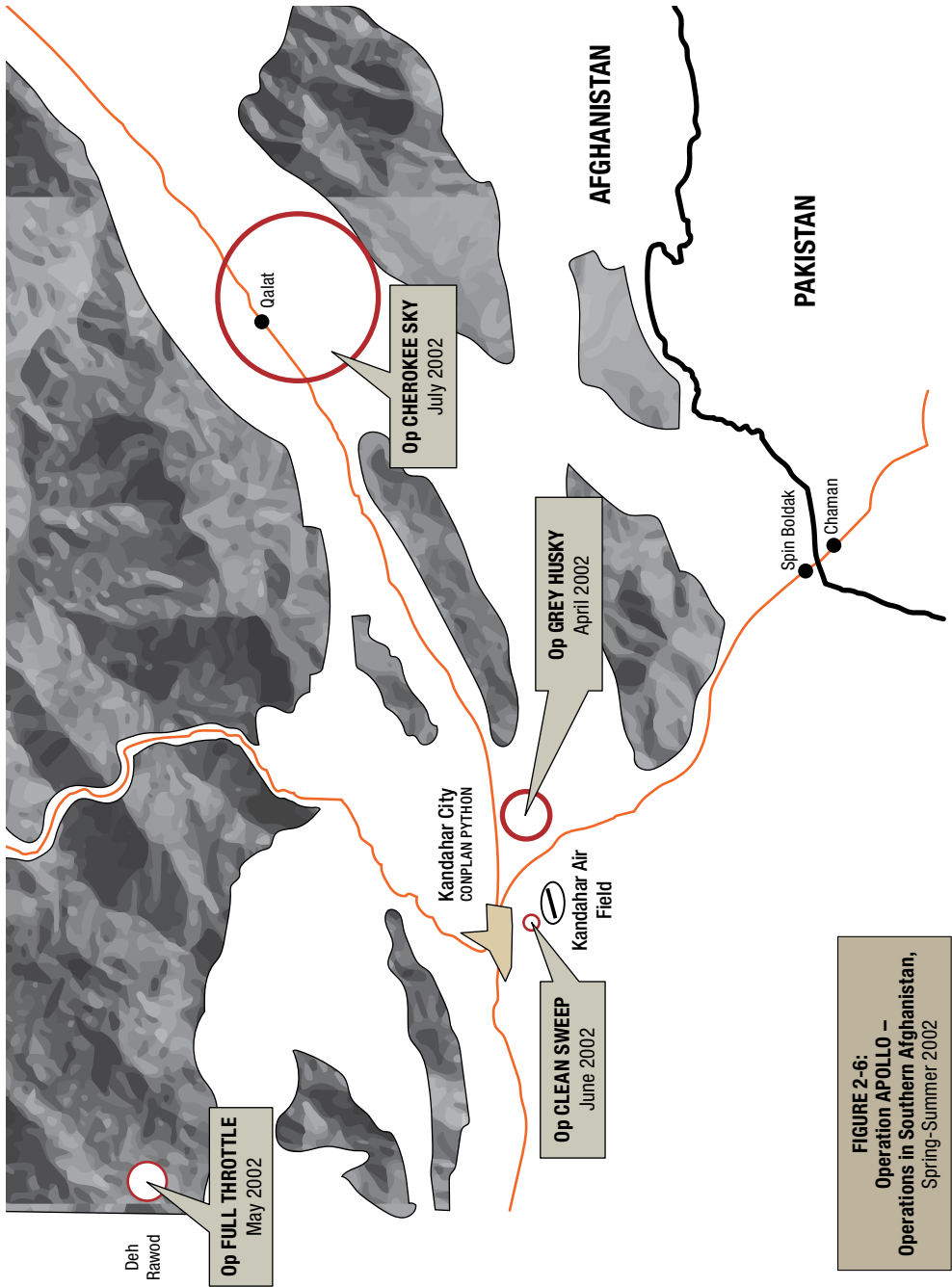


FIGURE 2-6:
Operation APOLLO –
Operations in Southern Afghanistan,
Spring-Summer 2002

Figure 2-6: Operation APOLLO – Operations in Southern Afghanistan, Spring-Summer 2002

Deh Rawod was hot. There were ongoing indications that high-level Taliban leadership was still in the area. Consequently, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) commander and staff formulated a plan to go into the Deh Rawod valley and find them. At some point in the planning process, a requirement for a light infantry battalion emerged and 3 PPCLI became involved. This operation was code-named FULL THROTTLE.

The FULL THROTTLE organization was code-named TF TYCZ. Three AMF company-sized units accompanied by two U.S. Special Forces ODAs plus psychological operations teams and civil affairs teams were one element; 3 PPCLI with its three companies was the second. CH-47s accompanied by AH-64s would insert them. The third element consisted of two platoons of U.S. Navy SEALs flown in by 160th SOAR's MH-47D, MH-60 and MH-53 helicopters. AC-130 Spectre gunships would cover the operation from the air.¹⁶⁴

The main problem was determining exactly what compounds the enemy leadership occupied in the valley. The population was hostile and the introduction of a substantial force by ground would result in the activation of the enemy early warning system, which in turn would give the leaders time to escape or hide. The CJSOTF-A commander planned a deception operation with two special forces ODAs in an adjacent valley and Canadian and New Zealand SOF in other areas to draw enemy attention away. Once the intelligence picture improved, forces would conduct cordon and search operations.¹⁶⁵

Elements from three ODAs with SIGINT collectors plus a SEAL team would conduct special reconnaissance from the high ground around the valley. In the next phase, 3 PPCLI's three infantry companies would fly into blocking positions. ODAs with Afghan forces would pass through and initiate cordon and search operations. Another SEAL team would fly in and raid a number of compounds. 3 PPCLI's other tasks involved taking on any concentration of Taliban forces from the outside and preventing anyone from trying to get out of the search area.¹⁶⁶

Operation FULL THROTTLE was a significant and large operation, on par with ANACONDA or TORII. LCol Stogran, however, was not happy with the plan as, in his view, the intelligence was not exact enough. Consequently, 3 PPCLI removed itself from the planning process.

FULL THROTTLE, however, went forward. The air assault portion of the plan was shut down, for whatever reason. The plan was now for U.S. Special Forces ODAs and their Afghan forces to drive from Kandahar all the way to Deh Rawod. There would be no blocking force inserted by helicopter. After 3 PPCLI pulled out, planners tried to get a battalion of Royal Marines but were unable to obtain British concurrence. The final size of the force was whittled down to two ODAs, a SEAL platoon and a company-sized group of Afghans mentored by men from 19th SFGA.¹⁶⁷

As the force drove into the Deh Rawod valley, the early warning system alerted the enemy. The special reconnaissance teams then called in air support to suppress the machine gun and anti-aircraft artillery sites. AC-130s and JDAMS dropped from B-52s were used. One of these anti-aircraft guns was located in a compound adjacent to another compound hosting a wedding party. This gun engaged coalition forces and an AC-130 Spectre responded with its 25mm and 40mm guns. Unfortunately, the Spectre attacked the party compound, killing an estimated 40 people and wounding between 50 and 100. The elements from 19th SFGA noticed, on insertion, that they were about to attack the wrong compound and stopped just in time. Operation FULL THROTTLE was halted immediately.¹⁶⁸

The investigation into Operation FULL THROTTLE concluded that “the operators of those weapons elected to place them in civilian communities and elected to fire them at coalition forces at a time when they knew there were a significant number of civilians present.”¹⁶⁹

That did not assuage an antagonized population, however, in Kandahar City. Reports from the city indicated that the educated people were “sad” at the tragedy, but that the uneducated portions of the population were “angry” and thus subject to manipulation. The situation did not improve on 6 June when the new Afghan vice-president was assassinated.¹⁷⁰

3 PPCLI’s intelligence section assessment determined that coalition forces were “wearing out their welcome” and that another negative incident may well cause the public to turn against the coalition in masse.”¹⁷¹ That environment could produce problems for camp security or it might result in incidents where Contingency Plan PYTHON might have to be activated in the city. Fortunately, that did not occur during the rest of 3 PPCLI’s stay in Afghanistan.

Operation CHEROKEE SKY: Zabul, July 2002

By June 2002, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM planners started to look at Zabul province. This key geographical area not only sat astride Highway 1 from Kabul to Kandahar, but its capital Qalat was a large city close in proximity to a mountainous area adjacent to the Pakistan border. The Shinkay valleys were perfect for infiltration and provided cache areas, while Qalat could serve as a conduit for enemy forces still operating in Oruzgan province next door. A U.S. Special Forces ODA had been located in Qalat for some time but was pulled out. There were indicators that weapons were being moved and that Taliban and Al Qaeda factions were training in the hills for guerrilla warfare. And there were reports that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Mullah Omar and a number of Arabs had been seen. The governor’s support for the coalition effort was suspect.

Operation CHEROKEE SKY was designed to do two things: shake up Zabul to see what fell out of the tree; and help set the conditions for improved connections between the Afghan Interim Administration and Zabul provincial administration. Recce Platoon from 3 PPCLI using Hilux vehicles and desert clothing to reduce their profile would work with an ODA, callsign PYTHON, in order to develop information on the province's infrastructure and potential enemy target areas. Then, 3 PPCLI and American forces would conduct an air and ground manoeuvre onto selected targets, with 3 PPCLI handling the area north of Qalat and other forces working Shinkay and Qalat itself. There were supposed to be three interlocking operations throughout Zabul, but the only one to receive enough resources was CHEROKEE SKY, which now used a reduced number of forces but expanded to handle two of the three target areas.

Recce Platoon departed on 22 June 2002 to link up with the special forces in Qalat, while the Coyotes were pulled off the line and prepared for the operation. Recce Platoon promptly ran out of spare tires on the way, and an aerial resupply was arranged. Link up was achieved, the recce went ahead, and the platoon returned on 25 June with more information on the suspected training sites and cave hides north of the city. They were re-inserted on 30 June.

On Canada Day, B and C Companies air assaulted in U.S. Army CH-47 Chinooks onto the designated search areas where there were known caves but unknown contents. Maj Tom Bradley's Recce Squadron and echelon concurrently drove up Highway 1 to Qalat from Kandahar. B and C Companies came back with nothing in their cave searches. Recce Squadron and the Battalion HQ then moved to the governor's palace in Qalat to confer with him and his supporters, while the FSG and Admin Company arranged for aerial resupply of the forces using American helicopters. A quantity of 20 SA-7 surface-to-air missiles was turned over to special forces by the AMF working for the governor. After discussions with the governor, LCol Stogran decided to focus on the Shinkay Valley. The two infantry companies would air assault onto the high ground, while a combined Recce Squadron/Special Forces/AMF force would move by ground through the valley and conduct search operations. This is essentially what happened on 3-4 July. B and C Companies flew into blocking positions, while the ground force came in from the west. When there was no contact, a number of platoons were dispatched to a cluster of villages in a smaller valley south of Shinkay. Again, no contact. Local people (and most likely the enemy forces observing the affair) were amazed at the presence of the Coyotes in such an inhospitable environment – when one broke down, the crew were virtually swarmed by curious civilians. A pair of AH-64 Apaches flew in at low level and the crowd dispersed.

B and C Companies were extracted by helicopter on 4 July 2002, while Recce Squadron, Special Forces, and the AMF worked their way out of the mountainous region and back to Highway 1, returning to KAF late in the day.

Most participants in CHEROKEE SKY were unaware of the higher-level aspects of the operation. 2 (EW) Squadron and other allied and associated resources were focused on the region, waiting to collect on radio traffic capabilities displayed by any potential belligerents, specifically any early warning networks that presented themselves. Collection efforts started in earnest the minute Recce Squadron departed Kandahar and entered Zabul province. That effort continued throughout CHEROKEE SKY and was, arguably, the most successful part of the operation. It also contributed to OEF's understanding of the provincial dynamics necessary to establishing a coalition presence in Zabul, and then a Provincial Reconstruction Team in 2003. CHEROKEE SKY also demonstrated that Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces had freedom of movement even in mountainous areas close to the Pakistan border and could exercise that freedom of movement. The issue then – as now – was how to conduct deception operations to fool the enemy's agents and early warning networks so that the mission could be accomplished. In effect, Operation CHEROKEE SKY was the prototype of what would become a staple of later Canadian operations in Afghanistan – 'manoeuvre to collect.'

Conclusion

In the weeks after the Tarnak Farms incident, soldiers from A Company, a number of Assault Pioneers and a member of 12 Field Squadron designed a memorial cairn to commemorate the fallen. Such cairns have become a tradition for deployed Canadian units over the past 40 years – one stands on the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria, and another is situated at Ledra Palace Hotel in Cyprus. A portable version was located in Primosten, Croatia, and another in Bihac, Bosnia. In the Afghanistan case, the design evolved into an Inuksuk, an Inuit hunting and navigation aid from Canada's north. By the end of the tour, the monument was completed and included inscribed granite tiles with the unit's symbols of the lost personnel.

The Inuksuk still stands in 2011 at KAF. It has been displaced twice: from the international terminal to the Taliban's Last Stand terminal, and then from there to The Boardwalk, where it continues to remind passersby of the early days of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and what it cost in Canadian, American, and Australian lives.

The Canadian Army's contribution to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in 2002 was important on many levels. First, it was a clear expression of Canada's commitment to the international fight against the Al Qaeda organization in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. By stripping away the Taliban shield and assisting with sensitive site exploitation missions, the collective understanding about what Al Qaeda was up to – or, just as importantly in some quarters, not up to – was revealed to the coalition. That, in turn, facilitated other operations elsewhere around the world to counter other terrorist acts.

Second, Operation APOLLO's ground component and its operations went far beyond a symbolic commitment – though there were those in Ottawa who wanted a symbolic commitment, who wanted Canadian troops tucked safely away somewhere to keep domestic political risk levels low. The operating environment, national pride, and professionalism, however, demanded a real contribution that had to have a significant impact on the mission in Afghanistan. Securing base areas like KAF and Chapman Air Field, providing QRF for special operations extraction, augmenting the ISTAR collection apparatus and, most importantly, providing critically needed coordinating functions between coalition forces in the pursuit of all of those tasks significantly contributed to the success of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in 2002. Canada did not get in on the 'big fight' in the Shah-i-Kot Valley and, no doubt, there are some who regret it. However, the lack of participation in some of those actions should not be allowed to overshadow the other important Canadian Army contributions. Without those contributions, operations in the region would have been much more difficult and potentially more costly in manpower.

In the end, the ground operations in Kandahar in 2002 were an unintended but important precursor to Canada's extensive re-commitment to southern Afghanistan in 2005. No one thought Canada would come back to Kandahar. Certainly no one thought the Canadian Army would come back in force and help protect the city from escalating insurgent activity. But that was several years in the future. The Canadian Army would go back to Afghanistan, but this time to Kabul under a different command.



Photo Credit: Author

The Canadian battle group designed and constructed an Inuksuk-based monument to commemorate deceased coalition troops, including the four Canadians mistakenly bombed by the U.S. Air Force.

ENDNOTES

1. The NCCIS Light Det was later augmented with a Heavy Det and kept in theatre as a deployable link to Bagram Air Field.
2. Interview with LCol Pat Stogran (Kingston, 9 December 2002).
3. RAKKASAN is Japanese for 'falling umbrella,' that is, a parachute.
4. Stogran interview.
5. Address by VAdm Greg Maddison to the CANSOF conference held at RMC (8 December 2010).
6. Stogran interview.
7. Interview with Major David Short, U.S. Army, Combat Studies Institute, Leavenworth, Kansas (4 January 2006); "Statement of Lieutenant General Emil R. Bedard, Deputy Commandant of the Marine Corps for Plans, Policies, and Operations, United States Marine Corps Before the House Armed Services Committee Special Oversight Panel on Terrorism, June 28, 2002."
8. Sean M. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005).
9. *Ibid.* See also Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*.
10. HQ Marines Corps Intelligence Department, "SIGINT Marines Help Fight War on Terrorism in Afghanistan," *Intelligence Community Newsletter*, Vol. 1 Issue 2, p. 2.
11. "History of the 626th BSB," Fort Campbell U.S. Army Website.
12. Author's field observations on the American medical system at KAF, March 2003.
13. As described in Chris Mackey and Greg Miller's *The Interrogators: Inside the Secret War against Al Qaeda* (New York: Little Brown and Co. 2004). This section is derived from the author's analysis of over 700 JTF GTMO detainee assessment reports that are available at <http://wikileaks.org/gitmo>. These reports are invaluable for a number of reasons: first, they depict what the detainee told the interrogators, specifically where they were recruited and trained. Second, there is analysis by the staff situating what they were told, which is not always accurate or true, with summarized intelligence assessments and comparative analysis done between the interrogators to establish where the detainee fit within the larger jihadist enterprise. It is possible to reconstruct the broad outlines and even some detail on the bulk of the jihadist training network in Afghanistan from these records.
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15. Mackey and Miller, *The Interrogators*, p. 348.
16. CIA memorandum for Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Program (27 June 2013).
17. Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, pp. 240-242.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
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30. WikiLeaks, JTF GTMO, "Detainee Assessment: Min Gazrov" (14 March 2008).
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33. Jacquard *In the Name of Osama Bin Laden*, p. 51.
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48. See Mowatt-Larssen, "Al Qaeda Weapons of Mass Destruction Threat: Hype or Reality?"
49. Ibid.
50. The author received this information in December 2005 from an NGO liaison representative with the Kutchie tribes living in the Reg Desert, and from an Afghan security specialist originally from Spin Boldak.
51. Richard Miniter, *Mastermind: The Many Faces of the 9/11 Architect, Khalid Shaikh Mohammad* (New York: Sentinel Books, 2011), pp. 171-177.
52. Miniter, *Mastermind*, pp. 232-234. See also CIA memorandum for Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Program, 27 June 2013.
53. CIA memorandum for Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report on the Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Program, 27 June 2013.
54. 3 PPCLI OPSUM (20 February 2002).
55. Interview with LCol Tom Bradley, (Edmonton, 26 June 2008).
56. Ibid.
57. 2 (EW) briefing to the author. The Director of the National Security Agency commended the personnel from 2 (EW) Squadron and CFIOG for their work in southern Afghanistan.
58. Telephone interview with Major Rod Keller (13 November 2008).
59. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (6 February 2002).
60. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (27 February 2002).
61. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (13 March 2002).
62. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (7 April 2002); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (12 April 2002); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (15 April 2002).

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63. Telephone interview with LCol Colin Blair (28 October 2008); telephone interview with Major Marjorie Coakwell (10 November 2008); Telephone interview with Captain Gordon Hagar (14 November 2008). See also FSG War Diaries, DHH.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 128.
71. Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, p. 124.
72. Ibid., p. 188.
73. The American attacks were later determined in 2008 to be the handiwork of a deranged U.S. Army BW scientist.
74. Message to DL, 4A0013 file 3350-165/A27 v.3, "Kenya Anthrax Confirmed" (18 October 2001); "Possible Anthrax Letter Received by UN Offices in Nairobi."
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80. 3 PPCLI Op 002 GREEN GOPHER, "Operation GREEN GOPHER OPORD" (n/d).
81. 3 PPCLI Op 002 GREEN GOPHER, Memorandum for the record, "Subject: GREEN GOPHER 27 February 2002 (Sensitive Site Exploitation)" (27 February 2002).
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84. As described in Les Grau's *Operation ANACONDA: America's First Major Battle in Afghanistan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).
85. Interview with LCol Pat Stogran (Kingston, 9 December 2002); and Interview with Major Brian Hynes (Ottawa, 17 July 2008).
86. Memorandum Commander TF RAKKASAN to Commander, CJTF MOUNTAIN, "Narrative pertaining to the recommendation for award of the Bronze Star Medal for MCpl Graham Ragsdale, Canadian Army."
87. Memorandum Commander TF RAKKASAN to Commander, CJTF MOUNTAIN, "Narrative pertaining to the recommendation for award of the Bronze Star Medal for MCpl Robert Furlong, Canadian Army."
88. This translated into increased access to planning and intelligence aspects of OEF for Canada. See interview with Major Brian Hynes (Ottawa, 17 July 2008).

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89. Interview with LCol Pat Stogran (Kingston, 9 December 2002).
90. Stogran interview.
91. Ibid. See also 3 PPCLI "Mission Synopsis-Op HARPOON 13-18 March 2002."
92. Stogran interview.
93. 3 PPCLI "Mission Synopsis-Op HARPOON 13-18 March 2002."
94. As described in Les Grau's *Operation ANACONDA: America's First Major Battle in Afghanistan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).
95. Interview with LCol Sean Hackett (Kingston, October 2008).
96. Ibid.
97. Briefing, 1-187 IN, "Operation MOUNTAIN LION: Lessons Learned."
98. This section is in general based on information from "Tarnak Farm Board of Inquiry: Final Report" (19 June 2002). Michael Friscolanti's *Friendly Fire: The Untold Story of the US Bombing that Killed Four Canadian Soldiers in Afghanistan* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 2005) presents an exhaustively detailed and more human depiction of the events at Tarnak Farms and the various inquiries and trials that followed. See also interview with LCol Sean Hackett (Kingston, October 2008).
99. These edited transcripts are drawn from "Tarnak Farm Board of Inquiry: Final Report" (19 June 2002).
100. See the photo section in Michael Friscolanti's *Friendly Fire: The Untold Story of the US Bombing that Killed Four Canadian Soldiers in Afghanistan* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 2005).
101. "Tarnak Farm Board of Inquiry: Final Report" (19 June 2002).
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
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105. CANFORGEN 043/03 CDS 032 281524z March 2003 Honours and Awards Announcement.
106. C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume III: The Victory Campaign* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), pp. 223, 243. The numbers are approximate but sufficient for comparative purposes.
107. Scott Taylor and Brian Nolan, *Tested Mettle: Canada's Peacekeepers at War* (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps Books, 1998), Ch. 11.
108. Dalton Fury, the pen name of U.S. Special Forces officer Major Thomas Greer, has produced the only military account so far detailing the Tora Bora operation. What is clear is that there was debate between the various American component commanders and between them and the CIA as to the importance of the region and the status of the so-called 'Eastern Alliance,' and given that other operations in support of the Northern Alliance were a priority, the Tora Bora operation started as a minimally-supported reconnaissance in force. What remain unclear are the details of this debate, plus the IPB and shaping aspects of the operation prior to the insertion of the coalition force. See *Kill Bin Laden: A Delta Force Commander's Account of the Hunt for the World's Most Wanted Man* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2008).
109. Ibid.
110. 3 PPCLI PowerPoint presentation, "UBL is Dead, and We Can Recover His Body" (30 March 2002).
111. Ibid.
112. 3 PPCLI "FRAGO 1 to OPORD BLACK DEVIL" (n/d).

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113. Telephone interview with Major Colin Blair (31 October 2008).
114. 3 PPCLI SITREP OP TORII, DHH War Diaries Section, Box 1323 folder 8710 file 6 (4 May 2002).
115. Interview with Major Eric McFee (Kingston, 12 November 2008).
116. 3 PPCLI SITREP OP TORII (4 May 2002).
117. 3 PPCLI SITREP by Capt P.E.D. Nicholson, 3 PPCLI Intelligence Officer; interview with LCol Pat Stogran (Kingston, 9 December 2002).
118. 3 PPCLI "INTSUM of Al Qaeda Grave Exploitation 5-6 May 2002."
119. 3 PPCLI Engineer Op BLACK DEVIL Report, Patrol Report by MCpl R.B. Hryniuk (11 May 2002); Fury, *Kill Bin Laden*, p. 282.
120. 3 PPCLI "INTSUM of Al Qaeda Grave Exploitation 5-6 May 2002."
121. 3 PPCLI Engineer Op BLACK DEVIL Report, Patrol Report (11 May 2002).
122. 3 PPCLI SITREP OP TORII (5 May 2002).
123. 3 PPCLI "INTSUM of Al Qaeda Grave Exploitation 5-6 May 2002."
124. 3 PPCLI SITREP OP TORII (6 May 2002).
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126. See the front page of *The Progress News* Emlenton, Pennsylvania (8 July 2003) that shows the flag used by the various special forces units at Chapman Air Field being presented to the Emlenton Volunteer Fire Department; Brad Mills, "112th Signal Battalion soldiers get valor awards," *Army Communicator* (Spring 2003).
127. Gary Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*, pp. 240, 272, 275, 290.
128. "Afghan warlords battle for control of Paktia province," *The News International* (31 January 2002); Hamid Hussein, "Afghanistan-not so great games," *Defence Journal* (April 2002).
129. "Fighting in E. Afghanistan Claims More than 50 Lives," *Voice of America* (6 February 2002).
130. Scott Baldauf, "Al Qaeda Hunt: Violent Shell Game," *Christian Science Monitor* (20 May 2002); Hafizullah Ghashtalai, "Friction Over Land Rights in South," *Afghanistan Recovery Report No. 113* (1 April 2004); Hamid Hussein, "Afghanistan-not so great games," *Defence Journal* (April 2002).
131. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (27 February 2002).
132. Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, pp. 71, 157.
133. "Gunman Attack Afghan Security Chief," Associated Press (25 March 2002).
134. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (25 March 2002).
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136. Julian West, "Final Phase of Afghan Campaign is most deadly," *The Telegraph* (31 March 2002).
137. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (16 April 2002); CJTFSWA ASSESSREP, (S) SSS 10 G 3 3350-20 v. 3 (17 April 2002).
138. DHH War Diaries Section, Box 1781 folder 9795, "Operation WHITE FOX" (17 April 2002).
139. Interview with Major Mike Blackburn (Petawawa, 17 June 2008).
140. Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*.
141. Blackburn interview.

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142. Ibid.
143. Ibid.
144. Ibid.
145. Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*.
146. Blackburn interview.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. See JTFA-SWA ASSESSREPS for this period and see also Anonymous, *Hunting Al Qaeda*.
150. Anonymous, *Hunting Al Qaeda*, Ch. 1.
151. Human Rights Watch, "Enduring Freedom: Abuses by US Forces in Afghanistan" (2005).
152. JTFSWA HQ, Osborne memorandum (n/d).
153. 3 PPCLI INTSUM 72 (21-22 April 2002).
154. Author's observations in Kandahar City in 2003. The 19th SFGA was replaced with the 20th SFGA by that time.
155. 3 PPCLI War Diary, Commander's Entry (1-31 March 2002). DHH War Diaries Section, 3 PPCLI War Diary, Narrative (1-2 April 2002).
156. 3 PPCLI INTSUM 91 (10-11 May 2002).
157. 3 PPCLI INTSUM 102 (21-22 May 2002).
158. 3 PPCLI INTSUM 118 (6-7 June 2002).
159. 3 PPCLI INTSUM 121 (9-10 June 2002).
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161. Anonymous, *Hunting Al Qaeda*, pp. 85-86.
162. 3 PPCLI, Operation FULL THROTTLE CONOP (25 June 2002).
163. Ibid; Anonymous, *Hunting Al Qaeda*, Ch. 7.
164. Ibid.
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167. Anonymous, *Hunting Al Qaeda*, Ch. 9.
168. Ibid.; CENTCOM release 2002-09-03 "Investigation of Civilian Casualties, Uruzgan province, Operation FULL THROTTLE 30 June 2002" (6 September 2002).
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OPERATION ATHENA:

THE CANADIAN ARMY COMMITS TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE IN KABUL, 2002-2003

The last Canadian soldiers from the 3 PPCLI battle group left Kandahar for rest and recovery in Guam, but they were not the last Canadians to leave in 2002. Canadian special operations forces working as part of TF K-Bar and its successor organization continued until November 2002, as a Romanian infantry battalion replaced 3 PPCLI in the KAF security role and a brigade from the 82nd Airborne Division arrived to relieve TF Rakkasan. During the course of those months, a variety of events, many of them unforeseen and unplanned, laid the groundwork for the return of Canadian Army forces to Afghanistan in mid-2003 and formed the base of an unanticipated long-term commitment to that country.

Before we get into the specifics of Canadian Army operations in Kabul, it is crucial to understand exactly why Canada chose to commit forces to ISAF. First, there is a great deal of confusion on the part of the general public about these matters, particularly given that the decision was taken in the face of another possible commitment to the war in Iraq. Second, that decision ultimately affected the decision by Canada to commit forces in 2005 to Kandahar province. It is also extremely important to understand what Canadian leaders wanted to accomplish in Kabul. As subsequent chapters will reveal, the Canadian Army played a significant and even dramatic role in stabilizing the emergent Afghan state – and even staved off another destructive civil war.

What About Phase IV Operations?

The Afghanistan campaign in 2002 progressed more rapidly than anticipated, and by the summer CENTCOM had decided to cut back on American forces deployed there. There were various reasons for this, most of them related to planned operations against possible Al Qaeda lodgments in Yemen and Somalia, and the planned war against Iraq. It was clear that American planners at CENTCOM were looking at Iraq in late 2001 and that they were seriously concerned that the Hussein regime might eventually provide the Al Qaeda organization with scientific expertise or actual material for weapons of mass destruction. Despite the rhetoric and criticism that followed the 2003 invasion and subsequent insurgency in Iraq, the possibility of technology transfer was a real concern in 2001 and it was one driver in Iraq planning. It ultimately had a spillover effect on Canadian planning related to Afghanistan.

In February 2002, however, Canadian representatives in Tampa were getting better indications as to where CENTCOM wanted to head with Phase IV operations in Afghanistan. Phase IV was designed to “prevent the re-emergence of terrorism” in Afghanistan, specifically Al Qaeda. The end-state established for Phase IV was to include¹

- a. an Afghan government capable, unilaterally or with coalition support, of preventing the re-emergence of terrorism;
- b. a coalition that maintains the military capability to detect, deter, or defeat any re-emergence of terrorism in Afghanistan;
- c. the establishment of an Afghan National Army; and
- d. a security cooperation structure.

Key tasks to be undertaken to achieve this state included establishment of a “Follow-On Security Assistance Force” (or FOSAF) and organizations to handle “Security Cooperation,” and some means of linking them to the emergent Afghan government.

The British-led ISAF was planning to train the Afghan National Army, but was under-resourced, unenthusiastic and had limited vision – the British only wanted to train a battalion for Kabul and a nucleus Afghan training force. Discussions between interim administration chairman Hamid Karzai and U.S. President George Bush resulted in CENTCOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM taking a more active and larger role in Afghan National Army planning and training, with the more limited United Kingdom/ISAF planning pushed to the margins. Germany retained its control over Afghan police training, as it had committed to doing under the Bonn Agreement.²

However, someone was going to have to assist with stabilizing the country once the United States moved on; increased recognition of this fact in Donald Rumsfeld’s Pentagon drove the need for a follow-on security force. This included increased American interest within the Afghan Interim Administration in expanding ISAF throughout the country to urban centres, before the potential expiration of ISAF’s UN mandate. The Afghan Interim Administration was even pushing for German command of ISAF. The United Kingdom wanted to jettison its command of ISAF in Kabul as soon as possible for a number of reasons, but no one wanted to take on command of the force. Germany and Turkey were looking at that task, but Turkey’s role in ISAF command became entangled in Iraq war planning politics.³ The future of ISAF looked problematic – was it possible that Operation ENDURING FREEDOM would take over its mandate? That was a major question in early 2002.

Karzai wanted ISAF and its possible FOSAF successor to “be expanded from Kabul to all major urban centres” but “the political will and capability of the UN or coalition nations to meet this request is unclear.”⁴

CENTCOM planners also noted that some form of “Weapons Control Program” was necessary to deny weapons to any potential insurgency and to secure weapons for the emergent Afghan National Army. “Weapons must be decreased if the Phase IV objective to prevent the re-emergence of terrorist organizations is to be achieved; this would hopefully be accomplished without creating a power vacuum of military imbalance in any region.” Prophetically, Canadian representatives noted that

These plans, when implemented, will form the basis of transition of the Afghanistan operation from one of direct combat to one of nation building. CENTCOM’s position has been that the responsibility for nation building rests with the Afghan government however, as the mechanics of implementing these plans become known it is evident that if the overall OEF campaign mission in Afghanistan is to be achieved then CENTCOM will have to take more of a lead as well as a support role in nation building.⁵

At the end of March 2002, Canadian planners in Tampa and in Ottawa started to examine how to sustain a Canadian presence in Afghanistan if they were required to do so. The assumption was that Canadian strategic objectives would remain the same, that is:

- a. eliminate Al Qaeda as a continuing terrorist threat;
- b. take appropriate military action to compel the Taliban to cease all support, harbouring and cooperation with Al Qaeda;
- c. isolate the Taliban regime from all international support;
- d. bring Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda leaders to justice;
- e. address the immediate humanitarian needs of Afghans; and
- f. assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The second and third points were considered completed with all others ongoing. The Americans believed they would be in Afghanistan for two years. “There have been discussions on an expanded International Security Assistance Force under a new UN mandate which would operate outside of Kabul,” the planners noted, “however, this is unlikely and there are indications that the current ISAF mandate will be extended six months.” The American planners were looking at “ways to unify command within the [Area of Operation] under HQ CJTF Afghanistan,” that is, put ISAF under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, but “how ISAF would fit into the command and control arrangements remains somewhat uncertain.” Similarly, nobody was sure how the Bonn-mandated German-led police training organization and the planned American-led Afghan National Army training organization would relate to either Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or ISAF. There were just too many unanswered questions in March 2002.⁶

In May and June 2002, the United Nations Security Council accepted a proposal to extend the ISAF mandate by another six months. At the same time, Turkey took over command of ISAF from the British while the Afghan Interim Administration became the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA). The U.S. Secretary of Defense’s office announced that the United States would support expansion of ISAF outside of Kabul sometime in the future. ISAF command succession planning became a problem as Turkey indicated that it would take the role for one term. The Afghan Transitional Administration, in the form of Hamid Karzai, approached the Germans for help and the Germans and Dutch started to look at taking over from the Turks. Both countries then approached NATO for assistance in staff planning and intelligence enablers. NATO agreed to assist ISAF. That did not mean that ISAF was NATO-commanded yet, just that NATO was assisting the Dutch/German headquarters with the mission. NATO debated taking over ISAF well into November 2002.⁷

Iraq, Afghanistan – or Both?

The Canadian policy-making community was, by the fall of 2002, at a crossroads. It was evident that the United States was going to go to war against the Hussein regime in Iraq sooner rather than later. Canada had been involved in nearly every military action to contain Iraq since 1990 and was already committed to several supporting operations.⁸ Going into Iraq with the Americans would be consistent with existing long-term Canadian policy but only if there was a UN resolution authorizing the mission, which was still under dramatic debate well into the fall. It is important to understand that the Canadian government’s opposition to war in Iraq came very late in the game and was not extant in 2002.

Canada pulled the Operation APOLLO battle group out of Afghanistan in July after its six-month commitment, but kept the special operations forces committed until November 2002. The Minister of National Defence requested a study of Afghanistan and

Iraq options to be conducted by 30 August 2002. The Privy Council Office, Foreign Affairs, and the Department of National Defence were to coordinate in creating these options. The objectives of the study, as agreed upon by these three organizations, were to⁹

1. consider a military option, although Canada favours a peaceful resolution and would rather see Iraq accept the return of UN inspectors;
2. provide the Minister of National Defence with background information;
3. maintain Operation APOLLO completely separate from operations versus Iraq; and
4. determine what forces Canada could assign to Iraq.

Planners noted that six CF-18s could be committed to Iraq, but only for a single six-month deployment, while a light infantry battalion could be ready by the summer of 2003. The Chief of the Land Staff had an additional battalion contingency force that could be committed to Afghanistan if necessary, though that would mean pulling out of Operation PALLADIUM, Canada's Stabilization Force commitment in Bosnia.¹⁰

The full briefing to the Minister of National Defence, given in October 2002, concluded that “[the] original [OEF] objective of eliminating all terrorist organizations is not achievable – [this has] changed to defeating terrorist organizations with global reach.” That meant Al Qaeda, and, in the assessment of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM commanders in Afghanistan, “decisive combat operations in Afghanistan may have reached the point of diminishing returns” in that fight and the “possible expansion of ISAF [is] seen as a short term solution to expanding the Afghan Transitional Administration sphere of influence over regional warlords.”¹¹ No one was able to identify what the long-term solutions were.

Canadian planners also noted that an “inner coalition” was emerging in CENTCOM circles: those nations committed to Iraq, as opposed to those committed to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, which were not committed to Iraq. If Canada wanted to continue to have access to and influence in this process, a high-value Canadian contribution would have to be made in Iraq: a battle group, special operations forces, CF-18s, or some other commitment elsewhere. Canada, the planners believed, had several options. First, Canada could “backfill” in Afghanistan. Second, Canada could commit to combat operations in Iraq. Third, Canada could “fence-sit” and maintain the status quo with the Operation APOLLO naval forces, which remained in the Indian Ocean but were of lesser value now that the Horn of Africa had decreased in importance as a possible Al Qaeda sanctuary zone. Fourth was the “secondment” option: send Canadian exchange officers to serve in Iraq with allied forces.¹²

Canadian planners generated six “backfilling” options for Afghanistan using Canadian forces:

1. ISAF lead and an ISAF battle group by June 2003;
2. command of ISAF KMNB and an ISAF battle group;
3. an ISAF battle group;
4. training support to the Afghan National Army;
5. a battle group to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces in Afghanistan; and
6. officers to be sent to work with UNAMA.

It was evident that there were concerns about Canada not playing a significant role in Iraq and the potential fallout from that choice in coalition circles. The planners believed, however, that the United States and the United Kingdom would welcome a Canadian commitment to ISAF. But ISAF’s mission was changing; the situation in Kabul was increasingly fragile and there was the potential “for the [ISAF] mandate to expand beyond Kabul.” The Germans and Dutch were already inquiring at the Warsaw NATO ministerial meeting about having NATO take over ISAF.¹³

At that meeting, options involving taking ISAF lead and an ISAF/KMNB battle group option were not considered viable by Canada, though the commitment of a battle group to ISAF or one to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM were considered viable. Training the Afghan National Army was deemed to have a “slim chance of success” with regards to having any saliency in a “backfill” argument. Committing forces to fight in Iraq was considered viable.¹⁴

The possibility of a Canadian commitment to Iraq remained open well into 2003. When the Minister of National Defence was briefed in early January 2003, he was told that a CF-18 force, a Disaster Assistance Response Team, and a Nuclear Biological Chemical company commitment were all off the table as they were not viable options. At that point, the viable options included the Operation APOLLO naval forces re-roled to support Iraq operations; a special operations forces squadron; a special operations forces squadron plus a light infantry company to support them; a mechanized infantry battle group (ready to go by the end of April 2003); or a light infantry battle group (ready to go by early April 2003).¹⁵

Employment of Canadian forces in Phase I, II, and III operations (combat) in the Iraq effort was deemed a superior commitment to a Phase IV (stabilization) role. Why? Phase III operations would “provide Canada with significant leverage [regarding] enhanced international relations.” Commitment of Canadian SOF, particularly Tier I SOF, was the exception in that it could be used to hunt high-value leadership targets in Phase IV and therefore had some saliency.¹⁶

In a subsequent discussion, DCDS planners confirmed that the Americans viewed Afghanistan as a secondary United States effort; Afghanistan was now believed to be in Phase IV (stabilization) and was rapidly becoming an economy of force mission. There were security challenges and the future role of ISAF was uncertain, but the planned Provincial Reconstruction Teams, a concept being tested by the Americans in Afghanistan, were a possible means of extending Afghan government control over the countryside. A PRT commitment, analysis suggested, was not a viable option for Canada at this time because they were embryonic in structure and it was not clear where they would be located. In addition, the DCDS noted, “it is strongly recommended that Canada not consider ISAF lead” as a backfilling option, though the reasons were left unstated.¹⁷

Internally, the ISAF lead option was problematic. Taking lead nation status meant that Canada would have to provide the higher-level command and control architecture for the international force. That meant planning and logistics staff, signals systems, and intelligence processing capacity. These things were usually associated with Corps-level headquarters or even Division-level headquarters. Canada had neither, having disbanded 1st Canadian Division Headquarters in the 1990s to save money and relieve the pressure of critics who thought Canada had too many generals. The Army did have several brigade headquarters, so taking KMNb was considered to be more within Canadian capabilities at that time.¹⁸

Committing to Kabul

On 14 February 2003, however, ambassador David Wright informed the NATO Secretary General that Canada would contribute a battalion and a brigade headquarters to ISAF in the summer of 2003 and that Canada favoured expansion of the ISAF mandate outside of Kabul. How and why did this happen?¹⁹ The Chrétien government had not, at that time, ruled out a Canadian military commitment to Iraq – or, if it had, it was not communicated to DND or the Canadian Forces. Indeed, it looked in retrospect as if Canada was planning to commit forces to both conflicts simultaneously, or at the very least keep both options open. This is, of course, what planners do. At no time was there any suggestion that the planning staff was operating independently of national control. The Minister of National Defence knew what was going on, was ‘leaning forward’ and understood that the Prime Minister needed viable options no matter what decision was made about sending Canadian forces to either Iraq or Afghanistan.²⁰

Just when the situation could not get more confusing, a request came in from CENTCOM for Canada to explore taking a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. Lt Gen Michael DeLong, USMC, from CENTCOM, communicating with the DCDS, noted, “your early active response was a key to our success in Afghanistan and led to the swift defeat of Al Qaeda and the removal of the Taliban from power.” It was increasingly critical, the note explained, that the Afghan Interim Administration be able to expand its authority outside of Kabul. Three PRTs were to be established first, and more later. The role of the PRT was, as DeLong explained, to provide advice to local leaders; aid in the development of local and regional bodies to mitigate instabilities; facilitate information operations and non-governmental organizations operations; and monitor development.²¹ That request was put on the back burner for two months while the planners sorted out the NATO/ISAF connection.

Canada’s strategy in the NATO arena was to get Germany, the Netherlands, Italy or Spain to accept command of the higher ISAF headquarters, while Canada handled the Kabul Multinational Brigade and contributed one of the battle groups. This was in part done because Canada lacked certain ‘enablers’ that are usually associated with higher command: medium-lift helicopters, close air support, strategic communications, and theatre-level intelligence capacities. In this sense, Canada was paying for its lack of investment in such capabilities after the Cold War was over and when peacekeeping and stabilization were in vogue.

Italy, it turned out, was interested in leading ISAF in the future, but not in 2003. The French were unsupportive; strategically, they objected to NATO ‘out of area’ operations (and had done so historically,) and they expressed concerns that NATO would be seen as an occupying force in Afghanistan and did not want to be dragged in. Their expeditionary forces were also heavily engaged in neo-colonial enterprises in Africa.²²

At the end of February, MGen Cam Ross was dispatched to solicit NATO partners for an expanded ISAF. On the same day, the warning order for Operation ATHENA was issued: the Canadian Army was to be prepared to deploy forces to Kabul, Afghanistan, as part of a NATO-led ISAF mission.

MGen Ross’s journey was, however, disappointing. Spain was considering lead status, but was not sold on the PRTs or the need for ISAF expansion throughout Afghanistan. Italy would support NATO ISAF but did not want to over-commit because of its commitments in Kosovo. The Germans strongly supported NATO ISAF because they saw a need to give the mission long-term strategic direction that they believed it lacked, while both the Germans and the Dutch would retain control of ISAF as long as possible, until 2006 if necessary. Greece was indifferent, while France was unsupportive. France particularly did not support the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM/ISAF combination and was not prepared to expand ISAF outside of Kabul because of the security situation.²³ Finding a lead nation remained a difficult proposition.

Iraq continued to loom in the background throughout the whole Canadian Afghanistan planning process. The Iraq Liaison Team reported that the conceptual structure of a ‘Canadian JTF South West Asia battalion’ was completed. The deployment was based on several assumptions. First, that Canada would not participate in Phase III operations, that is, ground combat. Second, that Canada would maintain Operation ENDURING FREEDOM operations with “current assets,” that is, the maritime interception force in the Indian Ocean and presumably special operations forces. Most importantly, the team emphasized that it was “unlikely that the Canadian Forces can contribute [to Iraq Phase IV] because of the upcoming ISAF commitment.” Instead, to maintain saliency with the Americans on Iraq, various Canadian entities (read: CIDA) would be encouraged to contribute non-military governance capabilities, humanitarian assistance, financial support for reconstruction, rehabilitation of the civil infrastructure, and the reconstitution of governance institutions in Iraq.²⁴

On 25 March 2003, the Government of Canada decided not to participate in the Iraq conflict and notified the military authorities of that decision.²⁵ Yet, in mid-April, there was some prevarication. The planning staffs were asked to brief the Minister of National Defence on “possible participation in Phase IV operations in Iraq” – the stabilization phase. Once again, planners suggested that some combination of the Disaster Assistance Response Team, ships and land forces might be useful.²⁶ Potential Iraq commitments would continue in the background well into 2004 but would have no further influence on events once Canada was up and running in Kabul.

While the planning staffs grappled with multiple potential commitments, small numbers of Canadians were already on the ground in Afghanistan reporting back on the situation in both southern Afghanistan and in Kabul in March 2003. These included a liaison officer with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, two Canadian members of the Afghan National Army design team, a Royal Military College of Canada history professor, and then a five-man Canadian Strategic Reconnaissance Team (referred to as the ‘strategic recce’) led by MGen Andrew Leslie. The reality of the situation on the ground was fed into the Land Staff and the DCDS planners. Afghanistan, it turned out, was seething and ready to explode into a combination of ethnic violence and power broker jockeying for Kabul, while insurgent activity maintained a low but steady level of activity in the south supported by entities in Pakistan. The urgency underscoring all of this was not in the NATO analysis coming back to Canada, nor was it in the forefront of Canada’s preliminary planning efforts initially. The realities on the ground as reported by these sources played a role in the structuring of the Canadian force that would eventually deploy later in 2003.²⁷

Meanwhile, NATO was making headway on deciding how it would handle ISAF. The North Atlantic Council approved NATO's continued and enhanced support to ISAF while it looked at taking over the force. In time, Canadian diplomats mounted a tactful offensive to convince NATO members to accept NATO command of ISAF.

Kabul Mandate Development

By mid-April, NATO commands (two of which were working at cross-purposes according to Canadian planners)²⁸ had developed a concept of operations without conducting a detailed reconnaissance of the situation in Kabul and without reference to Canadian assessments. NATO planners believed that the objectives of the 2001 Bonn Agreement and the presence of ISAF were to “establish a politically neutral environment for a loya jirga to select Transitional Administration members.” They were correct in that an earlier emergency loya jirga had been protected by a British-led non-NATO ISAF. They further believed that the various UN resolutions and the United Kingdom-brokered Military Technical Agreement provided the basis for ISAF involvement in training the Afghan security forces. There was, however, no reference to the American-controlled TF Phoenix, which was already on the ground and had been working on this last task for some time. However, NATO planners did accept that the current priority task was to support the Transitional Administration in the provision of security in Kabul and environs. UN Security Council Resolution 1444 was considered the legal basis for ISAF's mandate.²⁹

NATO objectives now were to “demonstrate NATO's readiness to enhance ISAF support” and to “assist the Transitional Authority in maintaining security in Kabul so it can rebuild the country, and have a stable security environment and multi-ethnic representative government.” The threat to this, in priority, was considered to consist of³⁰

- regional warlords;
- social tension;
- rocket attacks;
- civil unrest; and
- anti-government forces.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of a tactic (rockets) as an operational-level threat, the placement of what NATO planners simplistically labelled ‘regional warlords’ at the top of the

list is significant. The reality was – and the NATO planners did not yet understand – that those ‘regional warlords’ controlled conventional armies with heavy weapons, armoured fighting vehicles and even Scud launchers; they had a high level of legitimacy among the ethnic populations they were drawn from; and they ruled over half of Afghanistan, not just the capital. They *were* the power brokers in the country, not the leaders of some enclave in Bosnia or Kosovo.

NATO planners established some limitations on what a NATO ISAF would do. ISAF was not there to protect Afghanistan from an external threat. It was not to conduct offensive operations against the remaining Taliban in Afghanistan (which cut across the last threat on the list). ISAF was not to conduct humanitarian assistance on its own but was to work to support international aid organizations and non-governmental organizations. ISAF would conduct mine-clearing and explosive ordnance disposal operations. The organization would not become involved, as the Stabilization Force had in Bosnia, in criminal tribunals and all of the messy paraphernalia associated with People Indicted for War Crimes (called PIFWCs or ‘piff-wicks’). Again, the sore points from NATO’s Balkans experiences came into play in the run-up to its involvement in Afghanistan.³¹

Subsequently, NATO planners established the following as a preliminary ISAF task list:³²

1. maintain a secure environment for the Transitional Administration in Kabul;
2. control Kabul International Airport;
3. provide force protection;
4. assist the United Nations with disarmament [Demobilization demilitarization and reintegration (DDR)];
5. assist the Transitional Administration in training security forces;
6. contribute to humanitarian assistance support; and
7. provide disaster relief.

The strategic recce team’s final report at the end of April concluded that the current commanders of (non-NATO) ISAF would be “extremely pleased” to have Canada join ISAF and that “There is no clear, organized force opposed to the presence of ISAF. However the likelihood of turmoil remains high.” Kabul was calm but unstable; there was a perceived

growing rift between the Tajiks and Pashtuns, with Mohammad Qasim Fahim of the Northern Alliance opposed to a foreign military presence in Afghanistan. According to the strategic recce team, the “Taliban and Al Qaeda do not present a military threat to ISAF. These terrorist organizations [do, however, have] the capability to form small cells for attacks.”³³

The most important and critical aspect of any future ISAF mission would be handling the security for the planned October 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga, an event designed to get all factions in Afghanistan ‘under one tent’ and hammer out what form of government Afghanistan should have. Only then could elections take place. There was a nascent Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process to reduce the size of the various armies that had fought in the civil war (of course, the Taliban had already been forcibly disarmed by Operation ENDURING FREEDOM), and enhancement of DDR was considered a key factor in reducing the potential for interference with “the Bonn Agreement.” There were Afghan commanders, of course, who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Successful DDR of the Kabul area could lead to expanded DDR throughout the country and, in the view of the Canadian strategic recce team, would enhance security generally. Failure of DDR in Kabul would cause problems elsewhere over the long term, with the unstated implication that Afghanistan would revert to a situation akin to 1992-1996 when the anti-communist commanders turned on each other and fought a three-year civil war. This, as we know, set the conditions for the Taliban to emerge in the first place.³⁴

The strategic recce report established tasks for any potential Canadian-commanded ISAF KMNB:³⁵

- maintain a high-profile patrol presence;
- protect key points;
- coordinate convoy security from Kabul to Bagram Air Field; and
- perform quick reaction force tasks.

If a Canadian battle group were part of KMNB, its tasks might include the following:³⁶

- profile patrols in a given area of operation and joint foot patrols in urban areas;
- situational awareness; and
- reaction to major incidents.

The Emergence of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams

While the staffs compiled their assessments on ISAF in Kabul, there were concurrent and significant developments on the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM front that would ultimately have long-term effects on the Canadian Army and its approach to operations in Afghanistan. Lt Gen DeLong's request for a Canadian PRT in February 2003 was the result of a nearly six-month process. Back in October–November 2002, OEF planners examined the problem in Afghanistan and concluded that certain provinces had potential 'sanctuary' areas in them and, so to generate a broader secure environment in Afghanistan generally, these areas needed a constant presence to deny the expansion of those areas. There were not enough OEF forces in Afghanistan to do so—and the planners did not believe that ISAF expansion was a solution. There were a number of reasons: the circumstances in each province were unique and required unique solutions; ISAF was not mandated to operate outside of Kabul; and NATO would take time to agree on expansion and time was of the essence. OEF's particular concern at this point were the provinces adjacent to Pakistan and the low-level insurgency that was active along the Durand Line.³⁷

The idea that small, unobtrusive teams could work alongside the Afghan militia forces at the provincial level in order to remove the "causes of instability" and "enable Afghan institutions" led to the idea of Joint Regional Teams. The idea was to group representatives from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNAMA, and non-governmental organizations with security sector integration representatives (Afghan security force training and development personnel) with a protective force alongside the emergent Afghan leadership in each province. Establishing these organizations would generate better ties between those remote areas and the Afghan Transitional Administration in Kabul. There would be enhanced intelligence collection in certain provinces which would feed the hunt for Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership targets as well as assist in conventional force targeting. In that case, a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha of 12 to 16 men would, in theory, become part of the structure.³⁸

By early 2003, the JRTs were re-named Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Their role was to "assist with removing the causes of instability" by "extending the Authority of the central government; assist in establishing stability and security; and enable reconstruction." In effect, the PRTs were directed at engaging the local Afghan leadership that was already in place and displacing militias with an organized security force responsive to the government as much as they were about addressing the insurgency. In addition, there was not a lot of hard information about each province's reconstruction needs, and some means had to be found to gather and address them systematically.

The test PRT at Gardez was considered successful. The Bamiyan and Konduz PRTs subsequently opened up by early 2003. Then Operation ENDURING FREEDOM ran into manning problems. Stiff bureaucratic competition for manpower in other areas in Afghanistan and, most particularly, Iraq, reduced the number of available effectives to the point that it could not fully carry out its plans.³⁹

On 25 April 2003, the Canadian representatives at CENTCOM were asked again about Canada taking on a PRT, possibly the Parwan PRT near Kabul. The staff was fully briefed on the PRT laydown: out of eight planned PRTs, the Americans had three, the British were going to take Mazar-e Sharif, while the French and Germans were looking at Herat. There were problems finding a lead nation for three other PRTs.⁴⁰

The PRT concept, stabilized by then, was much larger than the original JRTs. It consisted of a Political Advisor, a civilian police representative, a civil-military cooperation/civil affairs coordination team for humanitarian assistance, a robust intelligence collection system with an emphasis on human intelligence, information operations and psychological operations capacity, surveillance assets, contracting capability, public health assessment capacity, personnel from USAID or an equivalent development agency for assessing humanitarian assistance needs, plus a protection force.⁴¹

Conceptually, the PRT was to establish an understated presence and “effect change through non-violent means but be able to protect itself” while “marginalizing the causes of instability” by sharing information and enhancing reconstruction efforts. The PRTs were also to contribute to “creating a safe and secure environment” by “monitoring reform activities, facilitating negotiations to defuse tension, and assisting in the development of the Afghan National Army and Police.”⁴²

The DCDS staff in Ottawa concluded that “the Canadian Forces is not currently capable of leading or contributing to a PRT. The specialist forces are not available due to other commitments....however, the PRT concept could be linked to our exit strategy of our ISAF commitment.”⁴³

The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Political Advisor at the Canadian headquarters in Tampa at CENTCOM, Gavin Buchan, was a proponent of Canadian involvement with PRTs. He argued that the PRTs were “an attempt to promote constructive dialogue” between a neutralist non-governmental organization aid community, UNAMA, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in the future direction of Afghan reconstruction. It was “untried and in some ways quite radical especially when you consider that it is coming from the [U.S.] military....the odds of PRTs becoming an important factor in the stabilization of Afghanistan are steadily improving.” Subtextually, the message was that if Canada was going to play a positive role in reconstruction over the long term, the PRT was the way to go.⁴⁴

At this point in May 2003, DND and DFAIT policy planners and their ministers agreed that “the overall strategic intent of the Government of Canada is to prevent Afghanistan from relapsing into a failed state,” implying that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda would move back in and use it as a safe haven once again.⁴⁵ The situation in Afghanistan was deemed to be “stable but precarious” with most of the violence in the east and south. Violence had increased since January 2003 and “extremists” were reorganizing and employing more sophisticated tactics.⁴⁶

Canadian options were: join ISAF in Kabul; take an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT; do both missions simultaneously, or either mission sequentially. The idea was slowly coalescing that Canada could commit to ISAF in Kabul for the short term in a leadership role, then shift to an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT as a way out of that commitment but toward a longer-term commitment with the PRT. Unstated was that both NATO and the United States could be assuaged while still contributing in a salient way to the effort in Afghanistan, and at the same time staying out of Iraq.

Indeed, the planners did not even consider a long-term commitment to ISAF in Kabul as viable. Canada could provide the deputy commander, ISAF headquarters personnel staff, a brigade headquarters, and an infantry battalion group, but Canada lacked the higher-level communications and intelligence capacity to handle that commitment beyond a year.⁴⁷ Left unstated was that maintaining 50 to 100 or so people in a PRT with no unit or formation-sized commitment could be extended almost indefinitely.

In May 2003, the general direction of Canadian planning focused on the ISAF/Kabul option and how to fulfill it. The Canadian measurement criteria, as established by J3 International, were dubbed “S M L”: Security, Medical, and Logistics. If the various capabilities were not filled in the planning matrix, the mission would be problematic. Good Canadian planners try to make things happen with what they have, even if what they have is substandard. That was the pattern in the 1990s and in the Cold War. The stakes were different this time. For example, helicopters would be required for casualty evacuation. Canada had dispensed with the medium-lift CH-47 Chinook and replaced it with the CH-146 Griffon, an executive transport modified for surveillance operations. Could the CH-146 be used for casualty evacuation? Maybe. The CDS, a helicopter pilot, then said no. That meant that someone else in NATO had to provide casualty evacuation helicopters for ISAF in Kabul.

The planners identified a number of capability gaps: there had to be a Role-3-level hospital, that is, one capable of a full spectrum of medical support including a surgical capacity. Another gap was the casualty evacuation helicopters. One of three battle groups in Kabul would lack a battalion-sized headquarters because other nations had only contributed infantry companies and not full battalions. Someone had to maintain and protect

Kabul International Airport, ISAF's logistical lifeline. That would take nearly a battalion plus technical troops. ISAF HQ needed a security company to protect it. NATO planners assumed that Canada would provide all this, but Canada could not. When other NATO members were reticent, the Canadian representatives told them that if another country did not provide a Role-3 hospital, Canada would pull out of the discussions.⁴⁸ To keep things moving along, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe used the Canadian Role-3 threat on at least three occasions to leverage various commitments from other NATO countries.⁴⁹

BGen Marquis Hainse, the Canadian head of the planning mission, noted:

The most glaring point that resulted from this conference was the requirement for Canada to begin our exit strategy early on. It was evident by the lack of willingness to commit forces that it is getting more difficult for nations to make overseas troop contributions due to ever shrinking defence budgets and overextension of forces.⁵⁰

This applied to Canada as well. In 2003, the Canadian Army was committed to several other overseas operations in addition to Afghanistan, something easily forgotten in the wake of 9/11 and Operation APOLLO. There was nearly a logistics battalion on the Golan Heights with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, plus observers and staff scattered throughout four other Middle East missions. A battle group, with logistics support, was in Bosnia with the NATO-led Stabilization Force. Three missions were ongoing in Africa: Sierra Leone, Darfur, and the Congo. And there was still Haiti.⁵¹ All of these operations and associated Canadian representatives still had to be monitored and supported by staff in Ottawa that was drawn deeply into Iraq and Afghanistan contingency planning. There were only so many hours in a day and only so many people – again, the effects of the Government of Canada's 1990s over-commitment of forces and concurrent retraction of financial resources.

That said, Afghanistan increasingly became the main option and the most important international commitment for Canada. Plans were made to reduce or eliminate other commitments: the Army would pull its forces out of Bosnia in 2004 and reduce the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights around the same time. The trajectory was established: Canada would continue to be committed to Afghanistan. What fell out of the NATO negotiations was that Canada would command KMNB, 'enable' it as much as possible, and send a battle group. Germany would provide certain other 'enablers' and the force commander, but Canada would send the deputy force commander. Then Canada would take over command of ISAF in Kabul once Canada reduced in other geographical areas and could provide more headquarters horsepower.⁵²

What is not commonly understood but is extremely important to note is that the commitment to lead ISAF in Kabul was for one year. Canada's commitment to ISAF was *not* limited to one year. There is a tendency to view Canada's Afghanistan commitments in a piecemeal fashion. That is tempting, but it distorts the planning intent of the day. The Canadian Army was supposed to remain part of ISAF even after Canada relinquished command of the force. This was a deliberate pause to re-set the Army for future commitments to Afghanistan, whatever those might be, after what would be a trying year in Kabul. At this point in the process, it looked as though NATO would take over a number of PRTs outside of Kabul and then expand throughout the country. In other words, Canada was looking at a PRT commitment as early as 2003 in part as a means to get out of Kabul. And, once again, this was a relatively open discussion, not one hidden away in the deep recesses of the bureaucracy. DFAIT representatives were increasingly coming to the conclusion that the way forward was some form of Canadian PRT commitment.⁵³

Concurrent with these political developments and the force structuring staffing process, in June 2003 the Canadian policy process produced a request to the Prime Minister for approval of strategic guidance on Afghanistan. In effect, it was similar to the strategic guidance established in 2001.⁵⁴ Nearly a month later, the Minister of National Defence was informed that this guidance was acceptable.⁵⁵ Operation ATHENA, the Canadian mission to Kabul, was finally underway.

ENDNOTES

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16. Memorandum COS J3 to DCDS, "Response to CDS Questions post-23 January 2003 MND Briefing" (January 2003).
17. Letter DCDS to CDS, "CF Operations in Afghanistan/Iraq" (February 2003).
18. Interview with MGen Marquis Hainse (Kingston, 27 January 2010).
19. Letter Wright to NATO SECGEN (14 February 2003).
20. Hainse interview.
21. Letter CENTCOM to DCDS (25 February 2003).
22. DCDS, "Canadian Participation in ISAF-Diplomatic Strategy" (n/d).
23. "Visit Report – Visit to Potential ISAF Partner Nations" (28 February 2003); Briefing deck, "Military to Military Discussions" (24-27 February 2003).
24. Message, "Iraq Liaison Team" (24 March 2003).
25. Memorandum COS J3 to CLO PJHQ (25 March 2003).
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27. The author was the RMC history professor and was involved in some of these processes, including reporting directly to the Land Staff within 48 hours of returning to Canada from a protracted period in Afghanistan observing both ISAF and OEF operations. Major René Melançon was the Liaison Officer to OEF in Bagram. Though some treated Maj Melançon's reports as alarmist, they were in fact accurate and reflected the imperceptibly deteriorating situation in the south. MGen Leslie's visit to Kabul was marked by attempts by in situ international entities to downplay the tensions and risk level in the capital, but these were dismissed by MGen Leslie as transparent attempts to manipulate Canadian perceptions.
28. Hainse interview.
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36. Ibid.
37. Briefings to the author (March 2003).
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40. DCDS to CDS, "Brief to CDS: PRTs" (15 May 2003).
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42. Ibid.
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44. Message Gavin Buchan POLAD JTFSWA to dl (7 May 2003).
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CALM BUT NOT STABLE:

OPERATION ATHENA IN KABUL, AUGUST-DECEMBER 2003

In the wake of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's success, the Canadian Army maintained a presence in the capital city of Kabul during the tumultuous years of 2003 to 2005. It was a crucial period where Afghans decided on the future trajectory of their country and it set the context for the next decade of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. Canada's soldiers played a key role in establishing and preserving the protective measures for those processes. These measures were not limited to static protective guard. Indeed, they were a combination of deft and politically astute actions taken by a small out-gunned force in a vast urban area. That spectrum of violence could range from demonstrations, to terrorist action, to conventional operations involving artillery and armour. Enemies and potential enemies lurked in every dark corner of Kabul. This was a campaign totally unlike the Army's involvement in Operation APOLLO and completely different from the subsequent campaign in Kandahar province. Kabul in 2003 was a crucial turning point in stabilizing Afghanistan, and the Canadian Army was at the centre of it.

Kabul: Vital Ground

Kabul was problematic on the political/military front. During the jihad in the 1980s, regional commanders and their supporters emerged and formed resistance groups, some of which developed political parties. These forces coalesced into the anti-Soviet Mujahideen. There was no overall central command of these factions. All had international and regional sponsors, some of which tried to group them and streamline logistics in order to assert some form of control. The surviving commanders and their guerilla forces, as well as some communist government commanders who defected with their formations, took control of Kabul in 1992. Over the course of the next year, these commanders and their armies fought amongst themselves with the city of Kabul as the primary battleground. That war was not just a military-on-military fight. It was closer to what was seen in Sarajevo than any other conflict at the time: kidnappings, rape, ethnic cleansing, and the use of artillery against civilians were part and parcel of factional operations during that time.¹

This conflict was as violent as it was convoluted and as a result had a direct bearing on how ISAF was to go about its mission in Kabul, precisely because the commanders from 1992-1993 were the same people that took the city again in 2001-2002. During the mid-1990s, the effects of that collapse on the rest of the country led to the creation of

the Taliban by entities in Pakistan to protect their interests in the south. The victorious commanders from 1992 reformed into various configurations and alliances to fight back against the Taliban movement as it spread to the north, while at the same time maintaining previous antagonisms generated by the fighting in 1992-1993. The possibility that Kabul would become a battleground between them again was real.

The Bonn Agreement was supposed to solidify initial stabilization efforts by introducing an UN-mandated security force and a number of uncoordinated programmes to back an Afghan Interim Administration. This had buy-in from the victorious Afghan parties in November 2001. Throughout Kabul in 2002, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM special operations forces focused on hunting Taliban leadership targets and tracking down Al Qaeda laptops while ISAF (in its pre-NATO incarnation) mounted visible patrols in the city. The victorious factions, fully equipped with tanks and artillery, remained in barracks throughout the city, warily eyeing one another and the “internationals.” The future was uncertain. If a political process producing some form of government did not take hold in 2003, the people of Afghanistan would find themselves right back in the midst of multi-factional violence, just as they had in 1992-1993. Strategically, the only beneficiaries of that chaos would be Pakistan, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda.

Kabul City, with its nearly 3 million people, was the chessboard that this game would be played on. ISAF troops with Balkans experience could be forgiven, perhaps, for looking at Kabul as if it were Sarajevo or Pristina. Yes, Kabul was in a mountainous region and yes, Kabul had ethnically divided armed militias. Kabul, however, was a huge area, and the number and experience of the armed factions far exceeded those of Bosnia or Kosovo. Motivations were diverse; it was not strictly an ethnic conflict, even though there were ethnic overtones, and there was, as always in Afghanistan, an economic layer underlying everything.

Kabul was surrounded by mountains but also had a crescent-shaped line of hills that cut the southwestern districts off from the other two-thirds of the city. A small number of passes connected the two portions, including those adjacent to the vital “TV Hill,” a former restaurant turned fortified communications outpost that overlooked everything. Homes and compounds were built terrace-like on the hills, each a natural fortress. The northern part of the city was flatter; it held the commercial centre of the city and Kabul Afghanistan International Airport (or “KAIA”), the main ISAF logistics base. Industrial neighbourhoods sprawled east along the highway that went past ISAF’s Camp Warehouse, home to KMNB HQ, and led to the Khyber Pass and Pakistan. A more rural district, Bagrami, lay to the south of the highway down to the chain of hills, while the Shomali Plain extended north of Kabul Airport to Bagram Air Base, the main Operation ENDURING FREEDOM base in northern Afghanistan. (See Figure 4-1)

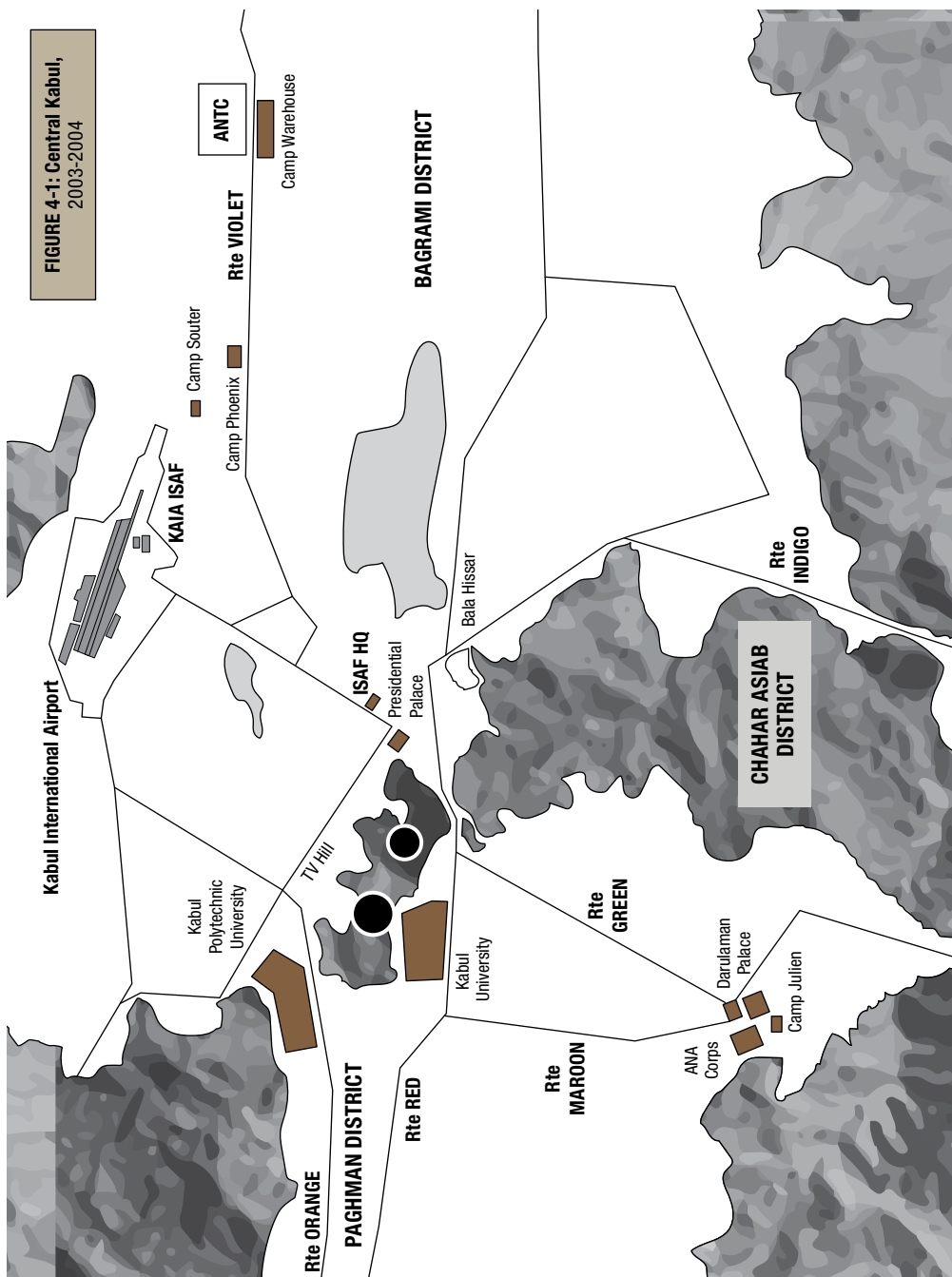


FIGURE 4-1: Central Kabul, 2003-2004

Figure 4-1: Central Kabul, 2003-2004



Photo Credit: Author

The Canadian ISAF contingent was primarily based at Camp Julien, constructed next to the Darulaman Palace, in the western part of Kabul. This area saw heavy shelling and rocketing during the 1992-1993 period when Afghan Mujahideen factions fought for control over the capital.

What eventually became the Canadian area of operations was in the south-west part of the city. It was the least desirable of the ISAF patrol areas from a force protection perspective as it was the furthest from the Kabul airport and could be interdicted at the passes. These areas held the university and other higher-education institutions, and the traditional Afghan seat of power: the Darulaman Palace, site of the 1979 Soviet coup. There were two main rural districts, Chahar Asiab to the south, which abutted Logar province, and Paghman district, which was adjacent to Wardak province. Both of these mountainous provinces were riddled with factions not sympathetic to attempts to stabilize Kabul.

The urban areas of Kabul did not correspond to the layout or the structure of a Canadian city. There were no traffic lights, for example. Older parts of the city and the mountain neighbourhoods were not conducive to motor traffic. As for street signs, there were few – large traffic circles were given nicknames by Canadian soldiers: Massoud Circle, because of the huge billboards of Ahmed Shah Massoud, or “Holy Fuck Circle” because of the chaos surrounding that particular shopping district. Organizationally, ISAF troops referred to the city by police districts or “PDs.” For example, the Canadian area had PD 3, the university area; PD 7, which abutted Chahar Asiab district; PD 5, near Paghman district; PD 6, where the Canadian camp was located; and PD 15. These areas were mixtures of residential compounds, decrepit strip mall-like businesses, ad hoc agricultural areas, and rubble from collapsed buildings of every variety. The roads were in poor shape. There was no running water. Few neighbourhoods had any form of electricity. There were wrecked vehicles everywhere. Kabul is at 1 800 metres in altitude, so oxygen is itself in short supply. In many ways, it was a near post-apocalyptic environment that Canadian soldiers were confronted with.

Who’s Who in Kabul

Every post-apocalyptic environment needs a post-apocalyptic army and Kabul was no exception. Kabul had several. In a general sense, there were three types. The first were the conventional formations, led by the major anti-Taliban military leaders. To some extent, they resembled combat-depleted conventional formations; an armoured brigade might have seven tanks, for example, or an infantry division might boast about 4 500 effectives. There were also units led by commanders that had allegiance to one (or more) of the anti-Taliban military leaders, but whose forces bore direct allegiance to their immediate commanders. Then there were the remnants of defeated factions, factions that had fought conventionally in formations or units but had been destroyed and scattered by the coalition onslaught. They also had their sub-commander-led units that in some cases bore allegiance to no one. (See Figure 4-2)

In a general sense, the anti-Taliban factions transitioned into a pseudo-standing army that ISAF referred to as the AMF (Afghan militia forces). They still bore allegiance to their various leaders. The more fanatical members of the pro-Taliban factions transitioned into fragmented terrorist groups in the city, and guerrillas in the rural areas.

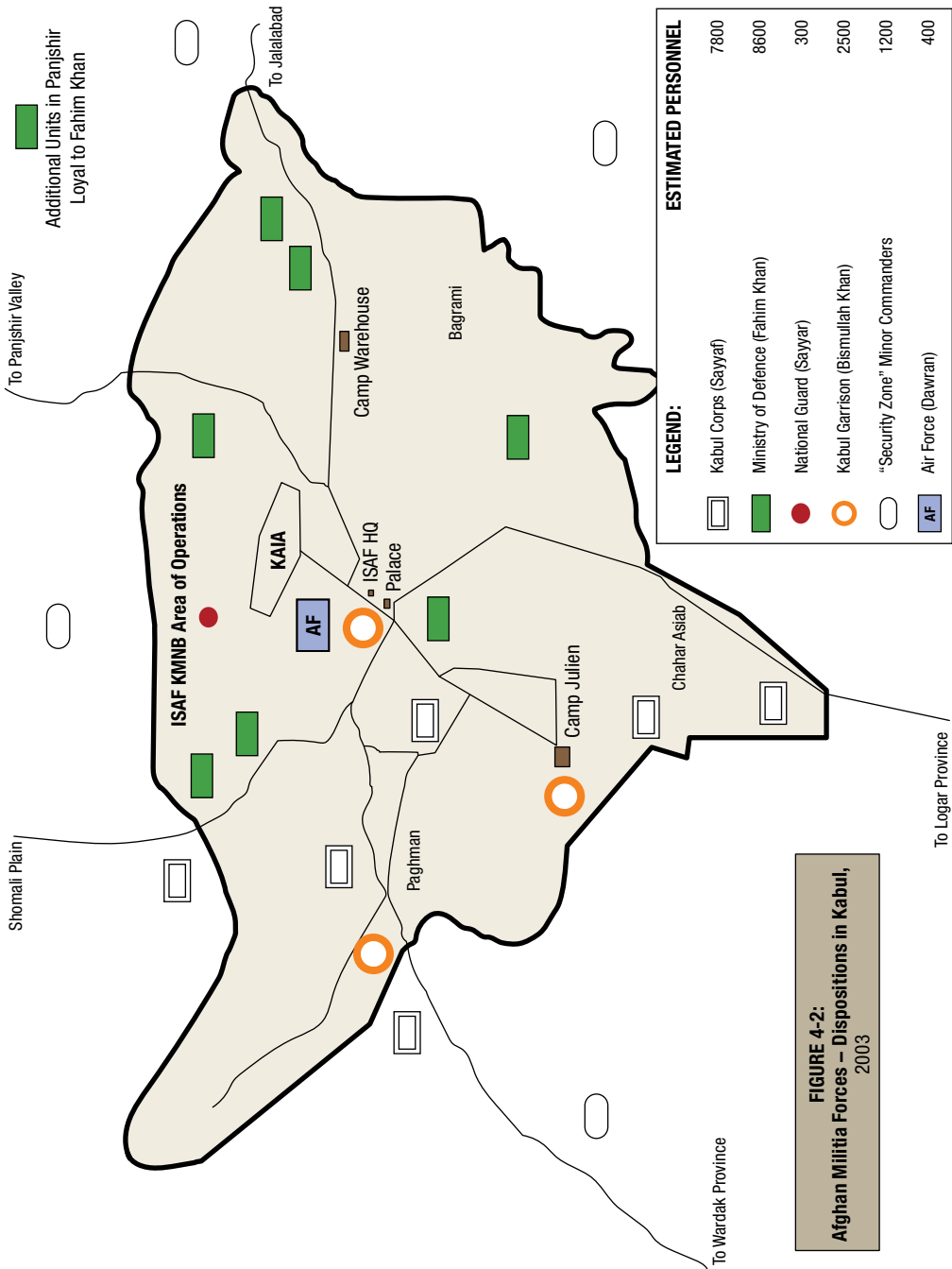


FIGURE 4-2:
Afghan Militia Forces – Dispositions in Kabul,
 2003

Figure 4-2: Afghan Militia Forces – Dispositions in Kabul, 2003

CHAPTER FOUR



Photo Credit: Author

These three pictures are a panorama taken in March 2003 from TV Hill of what became the Canadian area of operations in western Kabul. The first picture shows the intersection of Route Red and Route Green, with Green leading to the Darulaman Palace in the distance. The second shows Kabul University, while the third is Paghman district and Route Orange in the distance.



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

At the same time, TF Phoenix, the United States-led training group, worked with the British, French, and Canadians to build up the Afghan National Army (or ANA). The Afghan Army was not much larger than a brigade in 2002 and maybe a division in 2003, but could not really operate above the battalion (called *kandak* in Afghanistan) level. The Germans had responsibility under the Bonn Agreement for police training. There was some semblance of police organization in the city, much more than elsewhere in the country, but it was far from a professional force.

Although it was difficult for some Bosnia-acclimatized troops to grasp, Kabul was a bewildering mix of political, religious, and ethnic factions. In Bosnia, it was fairly clear – the Bosnian Serbs had their districts, the Bosnian Croats had theirs, while the Bosnian Muslims had enclaves. This was replicated to some extent in Sarajevo. Animosity was generally predictable along ethnic and geographic lines. It was not as clear in Kabul and throughout Afghanistan. Too many factions had shifted their alignments in various combinations over years, much like a kaleidoscope.² In many ways, it resembled Lebanon more than Bosnia.

The word ‘warlord’ is pejorative, implies a lack of political acumen, and is over-used in the Afghan context. ‘Factional leader’ is a little too clinical and carries with it an implied lack of viciousness. ‘Power broker’, on the other hand, is a much better descriptive, combining political ability with ruthlessness. In 2003, the power brokers were in control,

not the Afghan Transitional Administration led by Hamid Karzai that was supported by the international community and protected by ISAF.

The main players included Rashid Dostum, leading the Uzbeks who were formed into the Junbish movement. He was a former communist general who changed sides in 1992 and assisted the Mujahideen forces in taking Kabul. The Tajiks were represented by several commanders: Qasim Mohammad “Fahim Khan,” who replaced Ahmed Shah Massoud after his assassination, was the military commander associated with Burhanuddin Rabbani’s party, Jamiat-e Islami. “Bismillah Khan” Mohammadi, Mohammad “Atta” Noor, and Abdul Basir Salangi were other Tajik commanders who had forces in the city, but there was no real unity among them. Bismillah Khan and Fahim Khan, for example, loathed each other.

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a Pashtun, led the Ittihad party, which was a fundamentalist Wahhabist organization funded by various Gulf states. Back in the 1980s, Sayyaf’s facilities trained Al Qaeda leader Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and took money from Osama bin Laden during those years.³ Other Pashtun commanders in the city aligned with Sayyaf included Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Sher Khan, and Abdul Mumtaz. These were all Sunni Muslim forces. Then there were the Shi’a parties: the Harakat-i Islami and the Hezb-e Wahdat. Wahdat was Hazara in ethnicity, while Harakat was not. Mohammad Karim Khalili led Wahdat while Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq led a splinter group of Wahdat. It was Sayyaf’s forces that ethnically cleansed the Hazaras in 1993, so there was a natural antagonism that existed between the Ittihad and the Wahdat. The fact that Jamiat-e Islami joined in the orgy of violence during that time produced another possible fault line between some of the Tajik forces and the Shi’as and Hazaras.⁴

Why does all of this matter? Simply put, the Canadian area of operations in western Kabul had been the battleground between these factions in 1992–1993 as they jockeyed for power. There were long-term effects from that struggle, including massive damage to the infrastructure and the social structure in these neighbourhoods. The Taliban had done little or nothing to rectify living conditions during their six years in power after the fighting.

Each faction had armies of varying capacities, numbers, and capabilities. All wanted influence on the future of Afghanistan, mostly at the expense of their rivals. Fundamentally, all of the power brokers were simply motivated by power and its benefits. There was no serious long-term vision expressed by these leaders in any of the years prior to the Bonn Agreement of 2001. It is critical to note that some factions had monetary and military support from Saudi Arabia, others from Iran, and many from Pakistan. It was not always clear how the national agendas of those countries played out through their Afghan contacts, but it was evident that Sunni-Shi’a rivalry was one layer, while Saudi-Pakistani containment of Iranian influence was another – or was it an extension of the ancient Mughal-Safavid

rivalry? Entities in Pakistan wanted a destabilized Afghanistan to avoid a two-front strategic problem with India. Other entities wanted a destabilized Afghanistan to avoid interfering with narco-trafficking profits. Determining who was doing what for whom became a major preoccupation for Canadian intelligence staffs.

The only factional leader at the time who appeared to have any vision was Hamid Karzai. The process that put Hamid Karzai into the Afghan Transitional Administration president's chair started with the use of his tribal and ethnic influence by American forces in southern Afghanistan in the successful bid to seize Kandahar City from the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The need to have a Pashtun leader in Kabul that could seemingly rise above the ethnic and political rivalries and ensure that the south did not break off from the north (or the north break off from the south, for that matter) was paramount – and recognized during the early days of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Karzai was acceptable to the power brokers precisely because he had little or no power⁵ – and some of the power brokers were in the government as part of the transitional administration. The Northern Alliance had successfully bullied the UN to keep ISAF's size small enough so it could not pose a military threat to their activities.⁶ All in all, the situation looked to be a good one for the power brokers. Operation EUNDURING FREEDOM would kill off Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) for them; those interlopers from Pakistan would be screened off. The Karzai-led administration, they believed, would produce much light but little heat and generate a pause so the power brokers could jockey about and figure out what the next moves were. Perhaps ISAF could be enticed to depart. Perhaps Operation ENDURING FREEDOM could be manipulated to kill political rivals. Then the game between them would start all over again as it had in 1992-1993. Or would it? None of them anticipated what the international community was about to do to prevent it. Certainly none of them anticipated that Canada would play such a central role in the process.

The Canadian Army in Kabul: Structure, Command, and Planning

Once the decision was made as to which part of the city the Canadian contingent would deploy and operate in, the Theatre Activation Team from the Joint Operations Group in Kingston, Ontario, flew into Kabul Afghanistan International Airport in the summer of 2003 and started work with contract construction personnel on Camp Julien. Rows of Weatherhaven tents and a perimeter of Hesco bastion walls and towers sprung up between what the soldiers called the King's Palace and the Queen's Palace. Canadian liaison officers at Camp Warehouse, the headquarters of Kabul Multinational Brigade over in the eastern district across the road from the Pol-e Charkhi storage site, and downtown at ISAF HQ prepared to receive the 1910 members of the incoming Canadian contingent in early August 2003.

The in-flow of personnel went relatively smoothly. The state of the equipment on arrival, however, left much to be desired. Problems encountered by Operation KINETIC in Kosovo in 1999 repeated themselves in Kabul in 2003. For example, Coyote surveillance vehicles arrived from 3 Canadian Support Group in Montreal with no forward-looking infrared systems. One Coyote even had a cracked hull. A vital piece of equipment necessary for mounting the 25mm main armament was found 10 days after arrival in a signals truck.⁷

On 11 August 2003, NATO took command of ISAF, transitioning from a NATO-supported command to a NATO corps-level command – a corps that essentially commanded a brigade and an airport. The dark blue flag with the white compass rose of the North Atlantic Alliance now flew at these headquarters. The predominance of German resources in ISAF dictated that the Commander of ISAF be a German general. Canada, as the second largest troop contributor, nominated MGen Andrew Leslie, who became the Deputy Commander (DComd). At this point, Commander ISAF commanded KMNB, the logistics contingent at the Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, and ISAF HQ and its troops. Discussions were underway as to whether ISAF would expand and take over the German-American pilot PRT project in Konduz, but that was highly contentious at the time. Indeed, the ISAF area of operations in Kabul itself was under dispute: there were vast unpatrolled areas between Bagram Air Field and Kabul and to the west and east of the city, which ostensibly were to be ISAF-controlled. Of note, ISAF HQ troops consisted of liaison teams, human intelligence teams, a “Commander ISAF Special Recce Platoon,” and a CIMIC Coordination Centre (or CCC). The CCC became a key player in international development aspects of the mission. Canadian staff played a role in all of these functions in addition to ISAF HQ staff functions.

The predominant player in KMNB, in terms of numbers and capability, was Canada; therefore, BGen Peter Devlin became Commander KMNB. Its main forces consisted of a Canadian battalion group (3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, led by LCol Don Denne); a German battalion group with a Turkish infantry company attached; a French battalion group; a British infantry company; and an Italian force protection company for ISAF HQ. The Brigade troops came from nine different nations. The Military Police Company had Canadians, Romanians, Croatians, Germans, and Danes, while the Multinational Engineer Group had companies from Italy, Greece, and Spain. Explosive ordnance disposal was handled by Estonia, while the Signals Squadron was Canadian. Germany provided three CH-53 helicopters for medical evacuation. There were also German psychological operations (PSYOPS) and Norwegian CIMIC teams.⁸ KMNB had about 1 500 combat arms soldiers, and 3 000 service support troops. (See Figures 4-3 and 4-4)

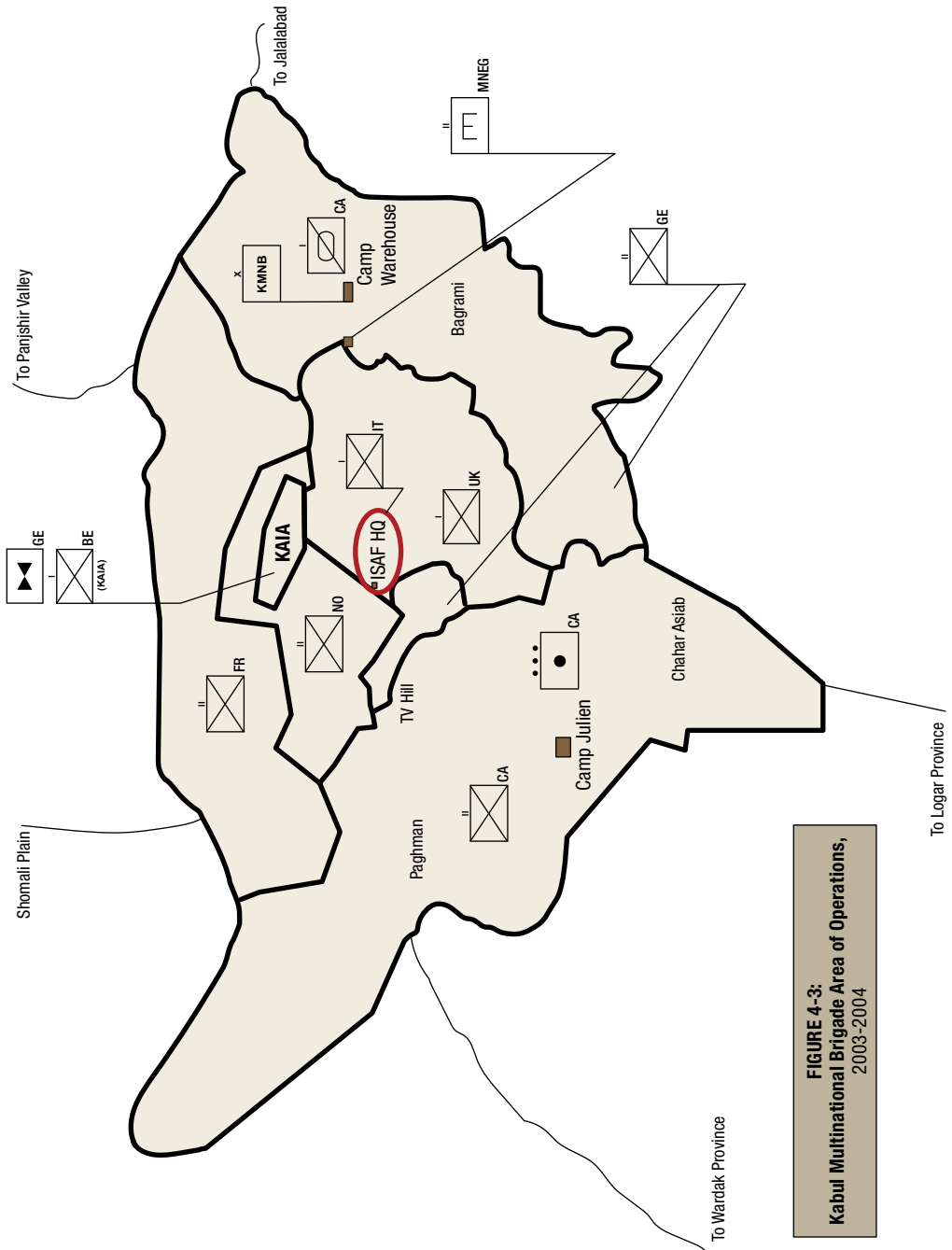


FIGURE 4-3:
Kabul Multinational Brigade Area of Operations,
2003-2004

Figure 4-3: Kabul Multinational Brigade Area of Operations, 2003-2004

FIGURE 4-4:
International Security Assistance Force
Operating Areas,
2003-2004

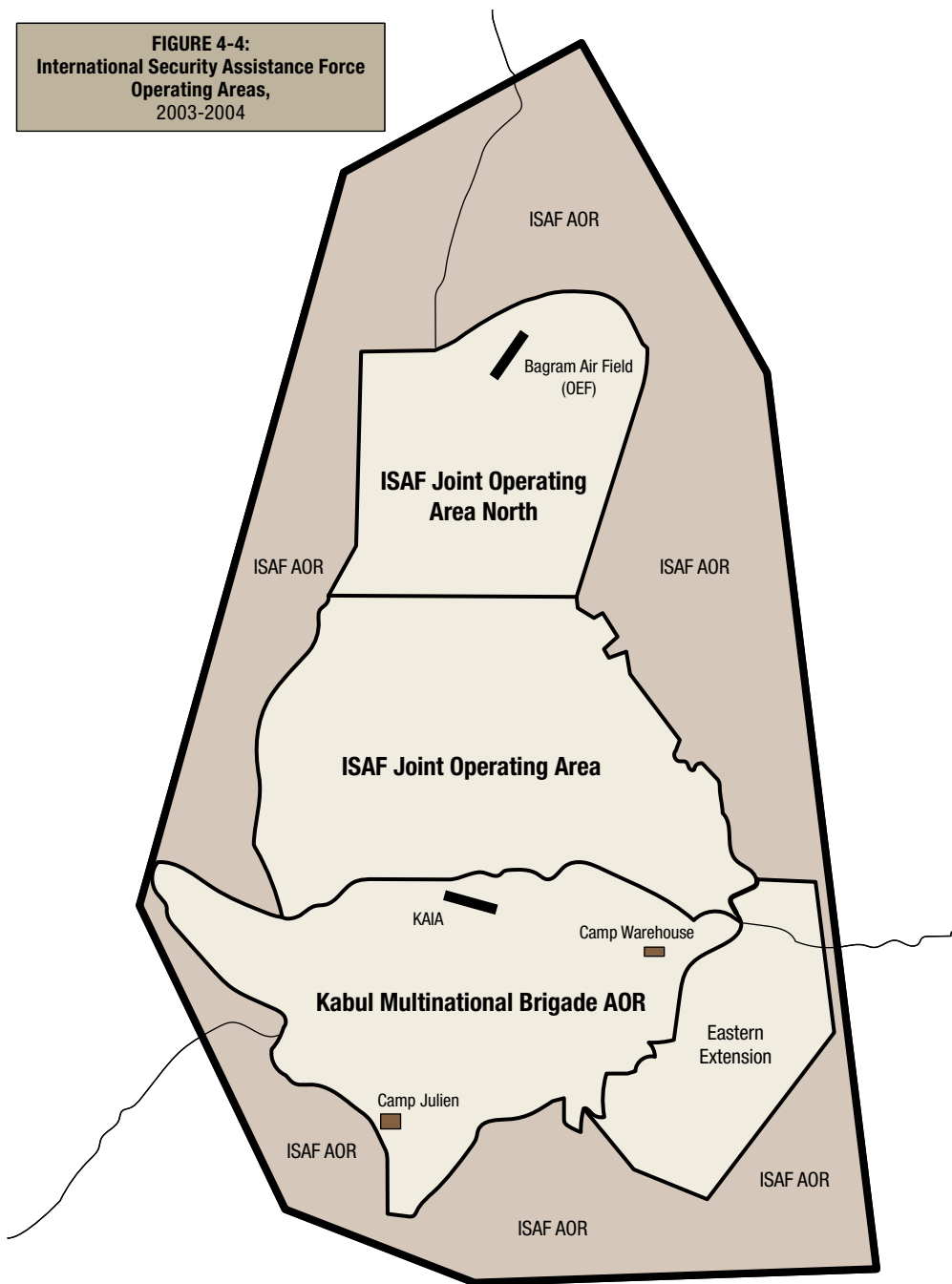


Figure 4-4: International Security Assistance Force Operating Areas, 2003-2004



Photo Credit: DND IS2009-25681a

Major-General Andrew Leslie, the Deputy Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, was responsible for protecting the interim Afghan government and disrupting the numerous threats to the emergent political process.

When Canadian planners looked at the situation earlier in 2003, the original KMNB organization was considered firepower deficient. Given the volatility of the situation in Kabul and the fact that Canada was going to deploy on the other side of the city, far away from the airport, one of the infantry companies in the Canadian battalion group was equipped with LAV III armoured vehicles mounting 25mm cannons. A four-gun battery of 105mm LG-1 guns from 2nd Regiment, RCHA, also joined KMNB.⁹ One pair of guns was stationed near KMNB HQ at Camp Warehouse while the other pair was at Camp Julien. These were supported by four ARTHUR (ARTillery HUnting Radars), leased from Ericsson Microwave, and mounted on BV-206 tracked chassis.



Photo Credit: DND IS2003-2498a

Canada agreed to contribute to ISAF as long as it was NATO-ized. Initially, International Security Assistance Force operations were limited to Kabul City and were in support of the Afghan Transitional Administration established by the Bonn Agreement of 2001.

A new type of Canadian Army organization was set up for the first time in Afghanistan; this was the ISTAR Company, which built on lessons learned from Operation APOLLO and Operation PALLADIUM related to the fusion and processing of surveillance system information. Led by Major Dyrld Cross, the ISTAR Company grouped several 'enablers' together. There were two five-car Coyote troops from the Royal Canadian Dragoons, about half with mast-mounted sensors. There was an electronic warfare troop from 2 (EW) Squadron. Canada deployed, for the first time in Afghanistan, a Human Intelligence team.

An all source intelligence centre and a geodetic support team were also part of ISTAR Company. The Germans also provided an electronic warfare team, as well as five 'LUNA' unmanned aerial vehicles (the Canadian Sperwer tactical unmanned aerial vehicle (TUAV) was deployed later in the tour). The idea behind ISTAR Company was to centralize all recce, surveillance, and processing assets in a single organization that reported to Commander KMNB and to remove 'stovepipes' identified on previous recce to Kabul.¹⁰

On the national side, TF Kabul included the Canadian National Command Element (NCE), led by Col Mark Hodgson and the National Support Element (NSE), led by LCol Chris Thurrott, and comprised a total of 350 logistics, administration, and signals personnel. There was also 24 Field Squadron, which consisted of 'declared' and 'undeclared' assets. One of the undeclared assets was the Improvised Explosive Device Destruction team equipped with explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) robots, and the other was remote-controlled M-113 armoured personnel carriers with rollers. Both remained Canadian national assets and not under NATO command. Similarly, a small Canadian special operations forces contingent was co-located with the task force; some acted as close protection party for Generals Leslie and Devlin, but they remained under the command of the DCDS and not the contingent in Kabul.¹¹

Higher national command and control remained convoluted for the Canadian contingent, as it had during Operation APOLLO. Deputy Commander ISAF, a Canadian Major General, in theory, reported to a Canadian Lieutenant Colonel at the NCE in Kabul, who then reported to an Admiral back in Ottawa. The situation was rationalized when MGen Leslie was double-hatted as the Canadian contingent commander. This in part related to the theatre-level support element at Camp Mirage in Dubai, its relationship to forward-deployed forces in Afghanistan and the tendency of the DCDS organization to reach forward and micromanage operations during times of political agitation in Ottawa. Indeed, the DCDS had to approve every direct action operation or deployment of Canadian personnel outside the boundaries of Kabul.¹²

ISAF's command and control arrangements also evolved significantly during Canadian tenure. NATO ISAF reported to Allied Forces North Headquarters, which was led by a German general who reported to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. At the same time, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces, American and coalition troops, reported to CENTCOM, the American regional command. ISAF's tasks involved stabilizing Kabul in concert with the Afghan Transitional Administration under a UN mandate, while Operation ENDURING FREEDOM stabilized rural provinces and hunted the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, also under a UN mandate. Both ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM occupied the same battlespace when it came to Kabul.



Photo Credit: DND KA2003-A332D

The volatile situation in Kabul throughout 2003 led Canadian Army planners to include artillery and TOW anti-tank missiles in the units deploying to Afghanistan. These LG-1 guns were part of this force protection package.

An understanding was reached whereby NATO SACEUR and Commander CENTCOM would liaise to deconflict operations in Kabul. CENTCOM's subordinate command in Afghanistan, CJTF-180, was tasked to support ISAF in an emergency. If ISAF had to extract from Kabul, ISAF units actually came under the command of CJTF-180.¹³ There were a variety of sub-agreements related to United States provision of close air support, medical assistance and evacuation and intelligence support.¹⁴

Canada's writ in Afghanistan was thus: ISAF was authorized by UN Security Council resolution 1386 on 20 December 2001. The mission was to "Assist in the maintenance of security for Kabul and surrounding areas, in order to allow the Afghan Transitional Administration and UN authorities to function" and "Liaise with political, social, and religious leaders to ensure that the religious, ethnic, and cultural sensitivities of Afghanistan are respected within ISAF operations." ISAF tasks included:¹⁵

1. ensure freedom of movement within Kabul and surrounding areas;
2. provide force protection;

3. advise the Afghan Transitional Administration on security structures and issues;
4. assist in the operation of Kabul Afghanistan International Airport; and
5. assist in the reconstruction of the Afghan national armed forces.

In his analysis, NATO Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces North Europe established several objectives:¹⁶

1. demonstrate the Alliance's readiness to enhance its support of ISAF;
2. assist the Afghan Transitional Administration and UNAMA in maintaining security in Kabul and its environs so that it can rebuild the country and establish a stable society led by a broad-based multi-ethnic representative government; and
3. assist in maintaining a secure environment in Kabul.

The criteria for success was the handover of the transitional administration "to an Afghan representative government" which would have at its disposal "a fully constituted and functional civil and military security structure."¹⁷

After Canada agreed to take on the ISAF tasks in Afghanistan back in the spring of 2003, MGen Leslie, his staff, and the army staff analyzed the situation in Kabul and drafted a number of planning assumptions that became the basis of the KMNB Campaign Plan.

Working backwards from the end-state, Operation ATHENA hoped to generate a situation where the aid and reconstruction organizations could conduct operations uninhibited; develop a more professional police force and army; develop and maintain KMNB's positive reputation; and promote a strong coalition between all parties. ISAF's centre of gravity was determined to be 'international and local' support for ISAF in Kabul. It was recognized that the forces of opposition hoped to disrupt ISAF and Afghan Transitional Administration security operations. Militarily, ISAF's objectives became to ensure security and stability, to support the Afghan Transitional Administration, and to support the establishment of durable security structures. There were four lines of operations to meet the military objectives. First, there had to be a secure environment. The key to this was the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration or DDR process. The militias had to be drawn down. Framework patrolling in the city was also crucial – ISAF had to be seen as supporting the transitional administration. Second, institutions needed to be developed, particularly the Ministry of Defence, while the police needed reorganization and equipping.

A secure loya jirga, a protected voter registration, and other election preparations were part of this line of operations. Third, the mission had to be protected, not just by passive measures but also by active measures. Fourth, the coalition needed to be strengthened so that a seamless transition to the next rotation could take place – and continuity be maintained.¹⁸



Photo Credit: Author

The CU-161 Sperwer unmanned aerial vehicle was initially acquired as part of the Operation ATHENA force protection package. Despite teething problems, the system redeployed to Kandahar in 2006. Callsign SKID00 provided reliable all-weather unmanned aerial vehicle coverage until its replacement in 2009.

What fell out of all of this was that the key event for the stabilization of Afghanistan was most likely going to be the Constitutional Loya Jirga. Representatives from all aspects of Afghan society were going to craft, with UN assistance, the type of government that Afghanistan was going to have. The Constitutional Loya Jirga was Afghanistan's last best hope for peace. Numerous entities could threaten or disrupt the proceedings; therefore, ISAF had to be in a position to protect the process, not just provide on-site security during the event, but also to forestall or deter interlopers long before the event took place. NATO planners addressed this problem, but it was buried in a list of 11 common tasks and obliquely referred to as “assist the transitional authority and UNAMA in preparation and conduct of the Constitutional Loya Jirga.” It was up to MGen Leslie and BGen Devlin to ‘operationalize’ how exactly this would be done. ISAF was out-gunned on several fronts if the conventional forces made trouble. There were also several terrorist organizations. Military force was not necessarily the best tool to use against them. How best to operate on all levels simultaneously while achieving the aim?¹⁹

One of the obstacles that emerged was the relationship between the Canadian commanders and Commander ISAF, Lt Gen Götz Gliemerth. For the most part, these were personality-based issues. Consequently, an informal division of labour emerged as circumstances and competencies dictated. Commander ISAF would deal with President Karzai, civilian ministers of the Afghan Transitional Administration, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (the head of UNAMA). DComd ISAF, MGen Leslie, would handle the senior Afghan government military leadership, both military and civilian, plus “every other local leader in Kabul that claims to be a general” as well as the non-UN heads of mission for the international community and their deputies. Commander KMNB, BGen Devlin, would focus on key power brokers that controlled events in the city itself.²⁰ This division of labour facilitated the reconciliation of the detailed planning done earlier in the year by the Canadian staff with the more vague approach already taken vis-à-vis their predecessors in ISAF and KMNB.

It is important to note here the existence of Operation ACCIUS. The Canadian Forces had deployed one officer with UNAMA since November 2002. UNAMA’s focus was on “political affairs and institutional development and governance,” specifically “relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts.” It maintained seven regional offices in the large population centres in Afghanistan. LCol Robert Jensen was the Military Liaison Officer who also provided advice where possible. The presence of a Canadian officer in UNAMA became important for coordination and information flow as the demobilization and decommissioning programmes got underway in fall 2003–spring 2004.²¹

Supporting Operation ATHENA in Kabul

The strategic logistics pipeline for Operation ATHENA was similar to the one established for Operation APOLLO. Almost everything came in by air to Kabul Afghanistan International Airport – either by AN-124 Antonov transports directly from Canadian Forces Base Trenton in Ontario, sometimes via an Intermediate Staging Base in Turkey, or by CC-150 Polaris and then CC-130 Hercules via Camp Mirage in Dubai.²²

During Operation APOLLO, the Forward Support Group handled the incoming supplies and equipment for the deployed battle group at KAF. The situation with Operation ATHENA was vastly different for a number of reasons. First, and most importantly, the comfort level for the deployed force in Kabul was significantly raised. Whereas the Operation APOLLO forces operated in a completely austere environment, Operation ATHENA would not. That meant that Canadian bed-down and welfare facilities at Camp Julien and Camp Warehouse had to be maintained. Second, there were in effect two geographically separate facilities in Kabul that had to be able to operate independently both defensively and in terms of maintenance.

This in turn meant that the ‘teeth to tail’ ratio between combat arms and support personnel might diminish, which was something planners in Ottawa were determined to avoid.

Their solution was to establish a National Support Element (a composite logistics unit), and then use the Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency (CFPSA) and an entity called CANCAP (Canadian Contractor Augmentation Program) to reduce the number of logistics soldiers in the force. In the Balkans, Canadian logistics personnel saw how European and American forces relied on ‘alternate service delivery’ contractors to construct and maintain camps in order to save ‘uniforms’ for operational tasks. The first Canadian experience began in late 2000 in Bosnia Roto 7, NATO Stabilization Force. This had a negative effect of diverting money back to Canada rather than enhancing the local economy, but there were people who were determined to use CANCAP to solve a myriad of problems. As a result, SNC Lavalin won a contract to provide a CANCAP organization of some 300 personnel to support Canadian logistics activities in Kabul. The CFPSA handled welfare activities.

Based out of Camp Julien with detachments at Camp Warehouse and at ISAF Headquarters, the NSE for Operation ATHENA, commanded by LCol Chris Thurrott, had personnel drawn from logistics units throughout Canada. The NSE itself was broken down into traditional Canadian logistics functions: Maintenance, Transport, Supply, Movements, Personnel Support, Financial Services, Postal Services, and Engineering Services. Where it differed was in the relationship with the battalion group and the ISTAR Company. In the past, each unit had its own administrative company that was integral to the battalion and interfaced with the logistics battalion. In part to save money and generate efficiencies, the administrative company for 3 RCR was reduced and its functions assumed by the NSE. This change, which was implemented for the rest of the Afghanistan war, resulted in intense debate within the logistics world and between it and the combat arms over who was responsible for controlling logistics and operations. Some believed that the new process was overly centralized and reduced the flexibility of the combat forces as the battalion group, for example, had to go to another organization to maintain its vehicles. Others disagreed, arguing that the new structure avoided a duplication of effort. The jury remained out for the time being.

On the signals front, the Canadian force had the ability to handle high frequency and ultra-high frequency communications between its units, and communicate with Canadian and allied computer systems both internally and strategically. This last part is important historically as Operation ATHENA was a watershed in the size and breadth of deployed computer capability.

The KMNB Headquarters and Signals Squadron were drawn from 2 Brigade in Canada, with signalers from the Land Communications and Information Systems organizations, augmenting the Signals Squadron at ISAF HQ. The 3 RCR Battalion Group and

ISTAR Company also had their integral signalers to maintain tactical communications. For strategic communications, there was a TF Kabul National Command and Control and Information Systems troop of 40 personnel with three deployed mobile terminal detachments: Camp Julien, Camp Warehouse, and Camp Mirage. These satellite systems were the backbone of communications to Canada.

As for health services support, there was a Health Services Support Company drawn from 2 Field Ambulance that included six Bison armoured ambulances and crews, plus 10 medical aids with the infantry battalion. The main ISAF hospital remained the German facility at Camp Warehouse.

Generally, the military end of the logistics system established for Operation ATHENA in Kabul functioned well without any catastrophic incidents. The hard work put in by the maintainers, drivers, and supply techs ensured that the battalion group, ISTAR Company, and their commanders at KMNB and ISAF HQ could focus on the demanding tasks of stabilizing Kabul in the face of a deteriorating situation. CANCAP and the CFPSA were, however, much more problematic. The NSE and CANCAP were not integrated well procedurally and, at times, worked at cross-purposes. There was no central logistics command post to mate all entities. CANCAP personnel were not security-cleared (many were not even Canadian), nor were they properly trained, nor were there enough of them, and operations were delayed as a result. SNC Lavalin, for the most part, was not fully prepared to operate in a hostile environment like Kabul, but at the same time, Canadian Forces logistics planners conceded that they might have asked CANCAP to do too much. In the end, it was questionable whether CANCAP actually freed up troops for other tasks. The engineers constantly complained that they were doing the contractor's work for them. The NSE went so far as to create a "CANCAP mitigation plan" in the event the contractor pulled out – this involved identifying NSE augmentees in Canada that could be flown to Kabul in an emergency. As for the CFPSA, "the principle CFPSA manager was a retired Maj, and was unwilling to work for a Capt in the NSE...there was considerable bureaucratic status-seeking among members of the CFPSA but after this was eliminated, the service became effective."²³

3 RCR Battalion Group Operations

It was the presence of the light Canadian battalion group based on 3 RCR that 'bought' operational influence within ISAF and NATO, which in turn allowed Canada to command in Kabul. Under the command of LCol Denne, the battalion group deployed three infantry companies: N Company mounted in Iltis jeeps into PDs 3, 5, and 14; Para Company also mounted in Iltis jeeps into PDs 6 and 7; and Charles Company, mounted in LAV IIIs into Paghman, Chahar Asiab, and the western districts. (See Figure 4-5)

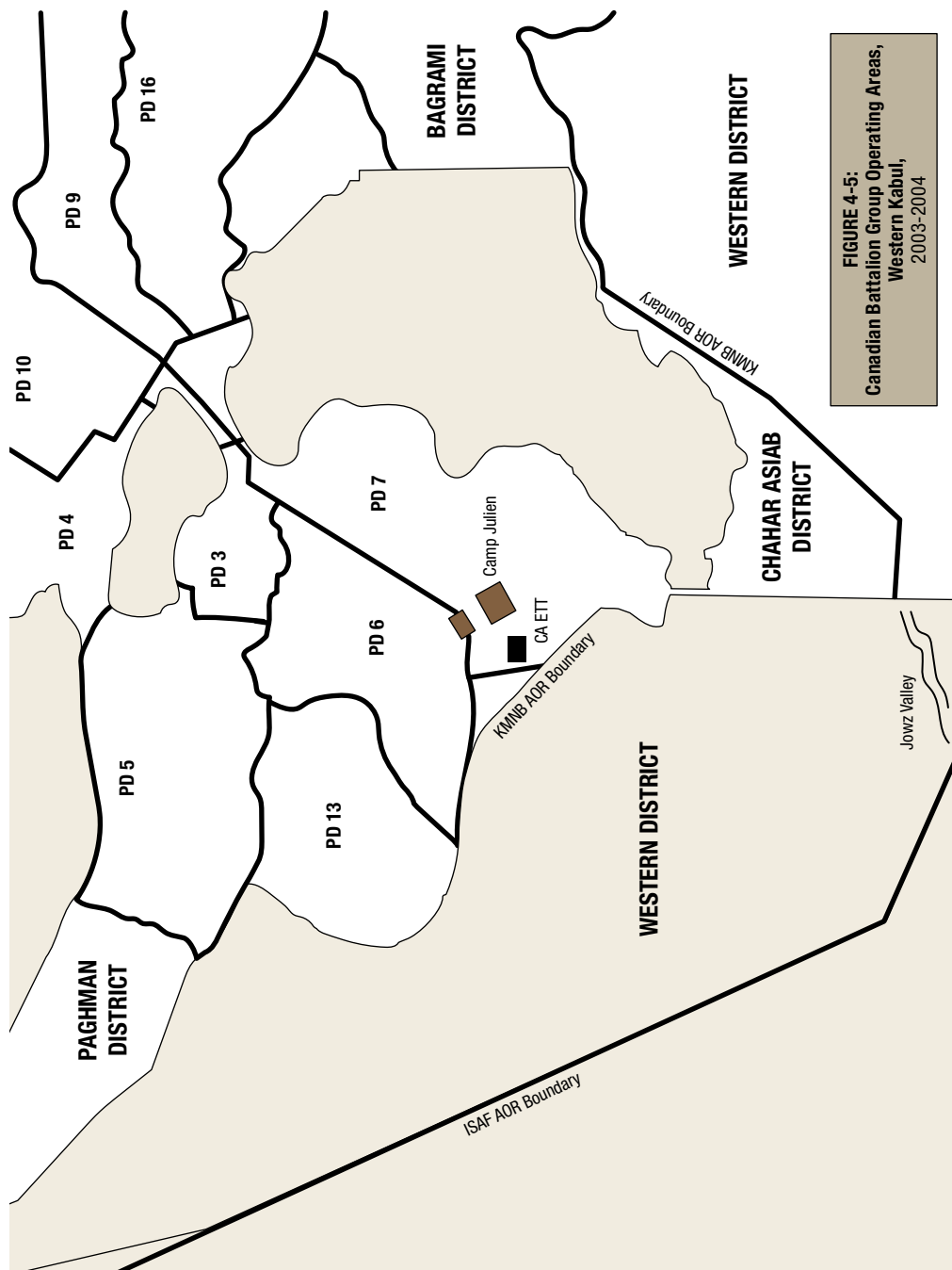


Figure 4-5: Canadian Battalion Group Operating Areas, Western Kabul, 2003-2004

Q Company, commanding a mixture of camp security, NSE and NCE troops, handled Camp Julien and the two observation posts overlooking the camp at the King's and Queen's Palaces. Combat Support Company's elements deployed as required. For example, Recce Platoon handled various covert and night observation tasks while an anti-armour direct fire support platoon, with its TOW missile-equipped Iltis vehicles, was responsible for creating an anti-armour plan for the Canadian area of operation in case the AMF tanks got loose. 24 Field Squadron was integrated into the battalion group – its tasks included defensive preparations for the camp, mine threat and infrastructure recce, EOD and IED disposal, and construction projects in support of the battalion group.²⁴

Unlike the previous Canadian deployment, 3 RCR Battalion Group deployed with a dedicated CIMIC group consisting of a platoon of 28 people, whereas the Operation APOLLO battalion group had an ad hoc CIMIC section. Their tasks were to assist with force protection through interaction with the population and the provision of low-level development projects.²⁵ CIMIC was central to the battalion group's concept of operations, which emphasized the maintenance of a constant presence in the area of operations through day and night patrols accompanied as much as possible by Afghan police. LCol Denne and his staff understood that the key to understanding the environment was “to quickly establish and maintain close ties with the police, mayors, and Mullahs utilizing CIMIC assets as an information-gathering tool and conduit for winning hearts and minds through humanitarian-type projects.” Helping the civilian police increase their professionalism was deemed crucial by 3 RCR planners.²⁶

The infantry companies patrolled their areas with the police and made contact with the population; specialist surveillance troops focused their efforts on specific targets to collect information; and CIMIC connected all of their efforts to the local population's leaders. These were called “framework operations” and, for the most part, this is what the battalion group's troops did day in and day out during their tour. Then there were Directed Operations. Anything outside of framework operations had to be referred back to Ottawa to the DCDS staff for permission before execution. Anything with the potential for political backlash or anything that was potentially high-risk had to be assessed by staff that were not on the ground in Kabul. For example, if a terrorist leader came under surveillance in the Canadian area and the battalion group wanted to snatch him, the operation plan had to go back to Ottawa and the battalion group had to wait for Ottawa to concur. If Canadian troops were needed outside the designated Canadian area of operations (not necessarily the ISAF area but an area established by Ottawa planners,) a plan would have to be formulated, risk assessed, and the plan then sent to Ottawa for concurrence.²⁷



Photo Credit: DND KA2003-A056D

The Canadian battalion group conducted an extensive patrolling programme in the Western districts. For the most part, these were mounted patrols using Iltis vehicles, though there was a LAV III company for more robust situations.

3 RCR had little information going into its area of operations and would be some of the first ISAF troops patrolling into the more rural districts. The terrain varied considerably. Paghman district, for example, was agricultural, as was Chahar Asiab. PD 3 was an urban area heavily damaged during years of fighting, while PD 5 was completely built-up. PD 14 was an urban-sub-urban mix. Ethnically and politically, almost all Afghan groups were represented in the Canadian area of operations. It would take time to figure out who was aligned with whom. (See Figure 4-6)

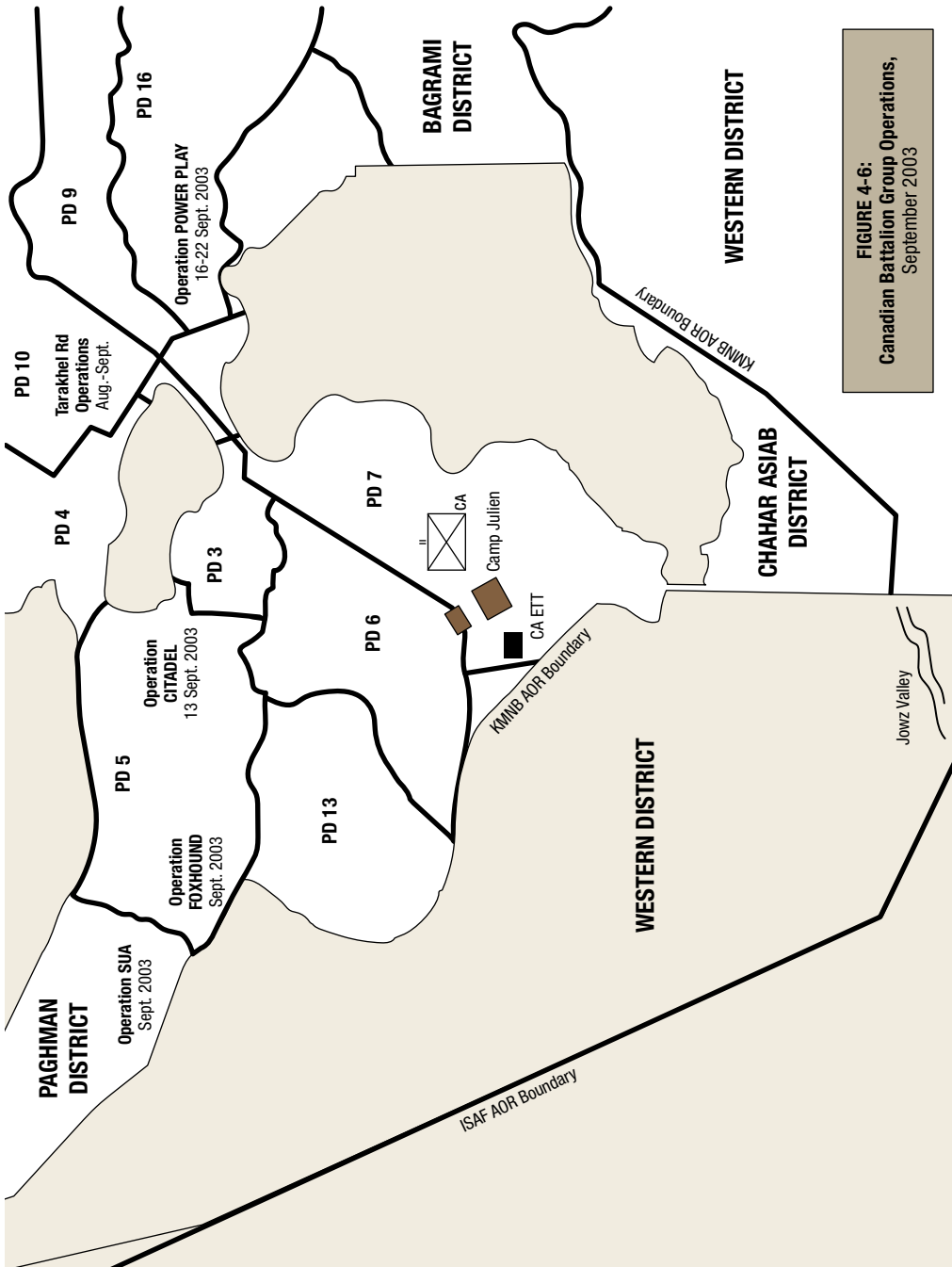


FIGURE 4-6:
Canadian Battalion Group Operations,
September 2003

Figure 4-6: Canadian Battalion Group Operations, September 2003

The battalion group was confronted with three additional issues in late August and into September. The first involved reports through the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM chain to Canada that an Al Qaeda cell was coming into Kabul to target the transitional administration leadership, that another cell specializing in suicide bombings was about to enter the city, and that there was increased terrorist training in Logar province, which abutted the Chahar Asiab district. Camp Julien was named as a possible target.²⁸ As 3 RCR patrols pushed out, they heard from locals that defeated Taliban leaders were actively recruiting in three of the districts west of Kabul. Canadian Human Intelligence teams deployed with the patrols and confirmed that the situation was changing.²⁹ The battalion group activated Operation WOLVERINE, which took some of the patrol resources from the PDs plus Recce Platoon and allocated them to the southwest part of western districts in an overt fashion to demonstrate presence and collect more information.³⁰

The second issue was the evolving situation in PD 5 and Paghman district. PD 5 was a predominantly Pashtun district (60%) which was aligned with Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf, who maintained residences there. The Sayyaf faction went back to the Jihad days of the 1980s. Sayyaf's forces joined the Northern Alliance against the Taliban even though his movement drew support from Saudi Arabia and was Wahhabist in orientation. Paghman district and PD 5 housed most of Sayyaf's AMF formations (1st Division and 10th Division) totaling some 6000 troops equipped with tanks and BMPs. Other Sayyaf-associated formations were based in PDs 6 and 7 near Camp Julien. The Sayyaf faction, it emerged, was conducting joint patrols with the police and further investigation determined that the police were co-opted by Sayyaf's AMF in Paghman district as well. This was potentially destabilizing since the allegiance of the police had to be with the government and not a factional leader so that legitimacy could be maintained. In effect, this was an overt move for parallel power in two districts. It also emerged that the crime increase noted in PD 5 was somehow associated with this power structure and that the police and Sayyaf's militia were involved; local *maliks* asked that Canadian patrols stay away from meetings. Operation CITADEL had an anti-armour platoon and human intelligence teams develop information on the situation, in preparation for a surge operation into PD 5. The patrolling surge took place on 13 September 2003 and crime dropped off temporarily.³¹

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Photo Credit: DND KA2003-A149D



Photo Credit: DND KA2003-A272D

Foot and mobile patrols were pushed out into the western districts of Kabul, which included rural areas that were adjacent to more problematic provinces like Laghman to the south and Wardak to the west. Laghman had Taliban sympathizers, while Wardak was HIG territory.

The third issue involved Canadian CIMIC reporting the existence of a refugee camp in PD 7. CIMIC reported that this camp was on land owned by a local businessman who wanted the camp dismantled. The refugees claimed that they had permission from the Ministry of the Interior to occupy the land temporarily. Depending on who was connected to whom, minor land disputes like this could escalate into a larger problem that might draw in other power brokers. Para Company was tasked to keep an eye on developments along with CIMIC: This was called Operation RAPTOR.³²

In all three cases, 3 RCR Battalion Group had to remain vigilant and look for opportunities to disrupt those trying to aggravate these situations while maintaining a presence throughout the Canadian area of operations.

Kabul Multinational Brigade and ISTAR Company Operations

3 RCR Battalion Group also had assistance from KMNB resources, including the Canadian ISTAR Company. KMNB maintained an ISTAR Coordination Centre that applied packages of surveillance systems to priority areas established by the commander: sensors like LUNA unmanned aerial vehicles, Coyotes with their mast systems, and electronic warfare systems, or collectors like recce, forward observation officers, and human intelligence teams. There were three types of tasks: standing tasks (analogous to framework

operations); directed tasks; and opportunistic tasks. ISTAR Company used a police analogy to explain its *modus operandi*. A snitch tip might lead to a phone tap, which in turn would produce a stakeout. The stakeout would lead to link analysis of all the persons involved, which would then result in a takedown. The police or the National Directorate of Security might do the takedown with conventional forces backing them up, or special operations forces might undertake a direct action mission.

In an environment like Kabul, the challenge for ISTAR teams was to be able to deploy and stay in a location while remaining undetected from the general population as well as the target. Deception and camouflage were skills in high demand as factional leaders and anti-government elements closely observed ISAF movements. A company-level operation might be mounted with a collection team embedded in it focused on a different objective, or Canadian soldiers from a broken-down vehicle awaiting recovery might decide to 'sightsee' with their digital cameras, for example.

As a brigade resource, ISTAR Company ranged all over the ISAF area of operations. Problems emerged in PD 10, the district surrounding Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, which ISTAR focused on in late August and early September. Information suggested that there was a terrorist cell operating in the village of Tarakhel, which was located northeast of the Kabul Airport runway. The French battalion did not patrol in that area, so there was limited information on the layout, social organization or anti-government presence. Once ISTAR Company applied its resources to the village, BGen Devlin convinced the French to conduct joint patrols with Canadian Coyote recce patrols. This led to the collection of more information, which pointed to people who were involved in the car bombing of a German military bus, that killed six and wounded 30 in June 2003. A major National Directorate of Security raid eventually mounted on Tarakhel netted 28 detainees, some of whom were involved in the attack.³³

PD 10 also hosted a number of AMF compounds, including the National Guard Brigade (800 troops), two independent infantry regiments, and two air defence regiments. One of these regiments was operating an SA-13 Gopher self-propelled anti-aircraft missile system and was "painting" ISAF and commercial aircraft with its radar as they were taking off and landing at Kabul International Airport which resulted in the firing of numerous flares, the dropping of much chaff, and many strained backs as aircraft radically manoeuvred to get away from what their systems said was an air defence threat. Another unit had a relationship to a refugee camp in the area and there was some concern about criminal activity around fuel sales and the improper re-allocation of humanitarian aid. Surveillance resources from ISTAR Company were applied which led in both cases to other agencies resolving both problems before they could escalate to violence and generate spillover effects elsewhere.³⁴

There was still something wrong in PD 10, however. On the night of 11 September 2003, rockets hit ISAF facilities in a coordinated but ineffective attack. Camp Warehouse was hit with two rockets, while Kabul International Airport reported two explosions to the northeast and west of the airport. Another rocket landed in PD 10, and another explosion was reported near the airport. Another rocket, this one unexploded, was discovered in the morning in PD 10. German patrols surged into Bagrami district south of Camp Warehouse to investigate yet another report of an explosion, while all other battalions surged into their areas of operations. None of the ARTHUR radars detected the attacks, which greatly concerned KMNB HQ. There was no adequate explanation found. It was some form of message from an entity unhappy with ISAF activities, but the content was unclear.³⁵

The ARTHUR situation became problematic throughout the fall. The systems were acquired because some believed that their presence provided a deterrent to factional indirect fire; this was seen in Sarajevo back in 1995. In Kabul, however, rocket attacks were singular, opportunistic “shoot and scoot” – they did not involve multiple rocket launchers or tube artillery, so there was nothing for the Canadian light guns to fire back at – if the AMF had deployed artillery against ISAF, the combination of the light guns and ARTHUR would have proved useful. To what extent the system deterred AMF artillery use is unclear. The restrictions on the use of ARTHUR were extreme – to save money, each radar was permitted to emit for 1 500 hours every 18 months. In other words, the radars could only be used during “peak periods” of potential attack. The systems were incredibly accurate at determining point of origin and, unlike other systems, they could detect rockets, but if they weren’t on, then a response was next to impossible.³⁶

As the situation in PD 5 heated up, ISTAR Company shifted its resources to watch the Sayyaf faction. Coyotes, LUNAs, and electronic warfare assets reported on criminal activity in PD 14 that apparently was linked with similar activity in PD 5. Operation SUA, designed to observe the two Sayyaf residential compounds, was activated. Much of this activity led to preparations for Operation FOXHOUND, a planned 3 RCR Battalion Group surge into PD 5 and Paghman districts. FOXHOUND, however, was delayed because of an even larger problem that was brewing: there were indicators that a coup d’état was in the making.

Operation POWER PLAY: 16-22 September 2003

In mid-September 2003, refugees returning to their homes in Kabul were blocked by Tajik AMF troops from re-occupying their residences. After several increasingly violent encounters, a number of refugees were shot and killed. On investigation, ISAF discovered that the culprits belonged to Fahim Khan, who was simultaneously the Minister of Defence in the Afghan Transitional Administration and the leader of the Tajik forces in the Northern Alliance. Housing and other properties vacated during the fighting in PD 10 now had been

claimed commercially by Fahim Khan – and the houses bulldozed. The land was then given to several transitional administration cabinet ministers: Pashtun, Hazara, as well as Tajik. UN Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi brought this to President Karzai’s attention. Karzai then issued instructions to his cabinet ministers that such activities were prohibited, and that there would be an investigation, which annoyed Fahim Khan.³⁷ Subsequently, Fahim Khan approached the American ambassador and told him that Karzai was weak, that he was not asserting enough control in the outlying provinces, that violence was increasing against the government, and he should replace Karzai. Fahim Khan intimated that other power brokers felt the same way he did. Karzai was about to travel overseas for discussions with the international community. Fahim Khan noted that he could take over bloodlessly while Karzai was away. The American ambassador attempted to discourage him from this course of action.³⁸

The Americans apparently did not convey this information to ISAF. Two Afghan cabinet ministers, Minister of Finance Ashraf Ghani and Minister of the Interior Jalali, approached Commander ISAF and Commander CJTF-180 with concerns for President Karzai’s safety.³⁹ At the same time, ISAF’s intelligence resources, including informants and radio intercepts, picked up the Fahim Khan AMF preliminary moves: these indicated that the target was the Presidential Palace.⁴⁰ ISAF HQ summoned BGen Devlin at 2000 hours 16 September 2003, where he met with the Commander ISAF and MGen Leslie.

“There is an imminent threat of a coup against President Karzai,” Leslie told him.

“Do you have a formal Warning Order for me?” BGen Devlin asked.

“There’s no time. Peter, we have to stop it right now.”

And with that, Commander KMNB departed for Camp Warehouse; the G3 was waiting, and commander and staff immediately drafted a warning order and outline plan called POWER PLAY by 2300 hours.⁴¹ POWER PLAY was deemed, for public consumption, to be an exercise. Troops were told they were rehearsing a contingency operation plan, but the real reasons for all of the activity were kept close hold to prevent the excitable and wide-eyed Canadian media from divulging what was going on.⁴²

The ISTAR Coordination Centre contacted Maj Dyrald Cross, who was out on patrol with the Coyotes. Recce Squadron was ordered to deploy and observe three militia compounds. The reasons were not passed over the net. The Coyote crews moved within sensor and gun range of the three Tajik militia compounds and were established before midnight. As the sensors swept back and forth and the crews counted T-55 tanks, BMPs

and multiple-rocket launch vehicles, orders came down from BGen Devlin: if there was movement in any of the compounds, report it. If the movement consisted of more than a company group in size, the Coyotes were authorized to open up with 25mm fire and coaxial machine-gun fire, withdraw, and then report to the nearest ISAF base.⁴³



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-R103-1272d

On two occasions, the Canadian ISAF contingent prepared to deploy forces to deter a coup d'état by Afghan militia forces. In the first instance, MGen Leslie and BGen Devlin prepared Operation POWER PLAY to offset Fahim Khan's Tajik militia forces. This involved overt preparations and covert surveillance operations.

Battle procedure continued all night. Anti-tank capabilities, particularly the TOW launchers from 3 RCR Battalion Group, were suddenly in demand as a counter to the armoured and mechanized militia forces, as were F Battery's 105mm LG-1 light guns. The Germans brought out their TOW Wiesel vehicles, and the French unveiled an undeclared anti-tank missile system. KMNB HQ activated its intelligence liaison with CJTF-180 and information started to flow in both directions.⁴⁴

The potential enemy forces in this operation included Lt Gen Bismillah Khan's Kabul Garrison's 717th Infantry Regiment and the 637th Tank Battalion with its 17 T-55 tanks and BMPs, which were both located downtown. These units were assessed to be the coup spearhead against the Palace. The National Guard Brigade, with its 10 T-55s and two T-62s were assessed as possible allies in the coup; their role would be to block KMNB units moving into the city from Camp Warehouse. There was also the 21st Infantry Regiment with its 400 personnel at Massoud Square in the heart of the city. These were all Tajik units. The air defence units near Kabul Airport were assessed as neutral.⁴⁵ (See Figure 4-7)

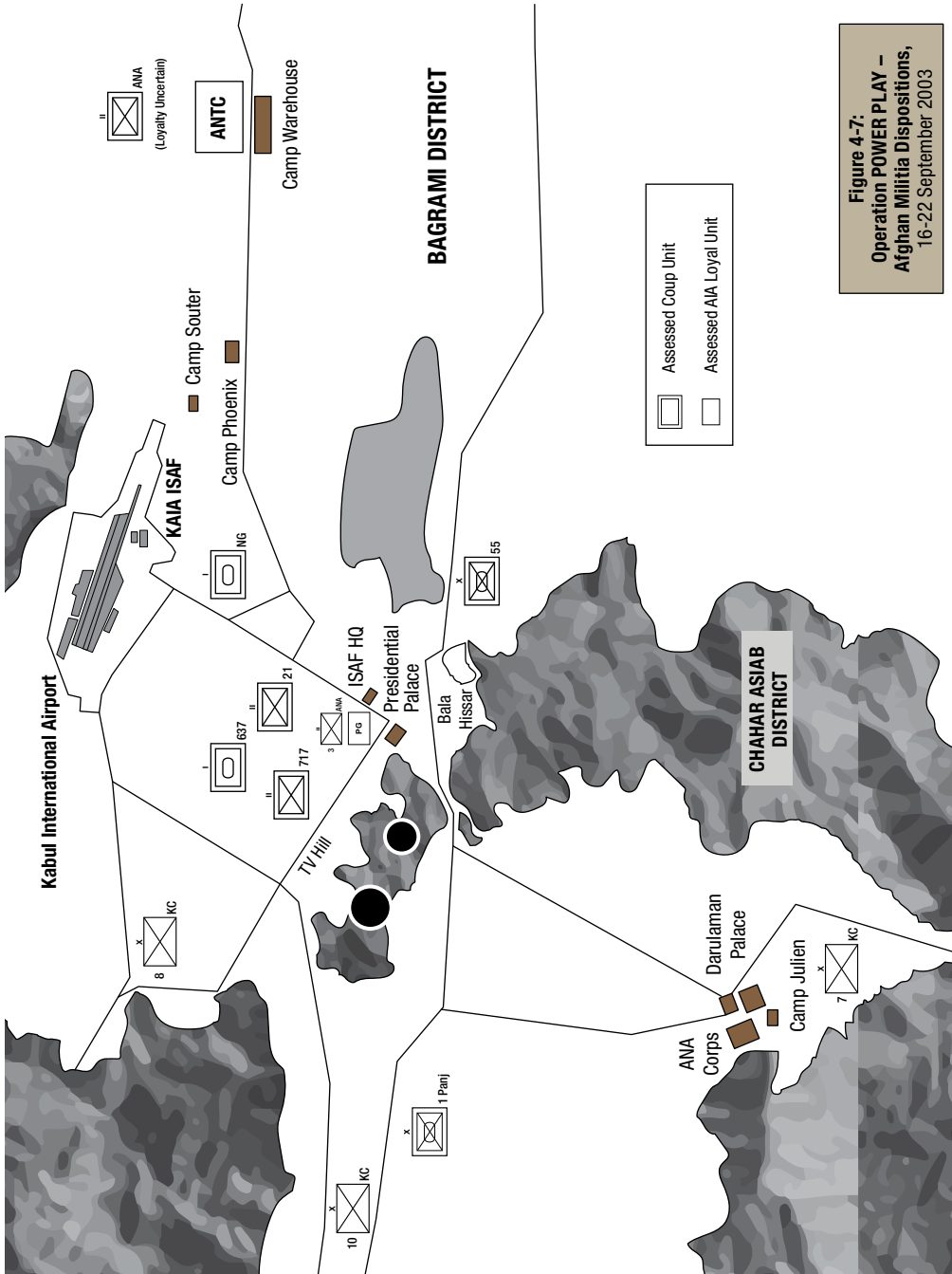


Figure 4-7: Operation POWER PLAY – Afghan Militia Dispositions, 16-22 September 2003

The Bala Hissar Fortress, containing the 55th Infantry Division (nine T-55 tanks, a battalion of D-30 guns, and 3 000 personnel,) was believed to be the outer cordon of the spearhead. The 1st Panjshir Division in PD 5, (six T-55s and 3 000 personnel) was mostly Tajik and was assessed to be a blocking force to stop Camp Julien forces from deploying. 16th Tank Brigade (12 T-55s) and 761st Anti-Tank Regiment (12 jeep-mounted Milan missile systems) were Tajik-dominated and were possibly going to be used to block American forces coming in from Bagram.⁴⁶

As for friendly forces, there was KMNB; the Ministry of the Interior under Jalali would support the President – he controlled the police QRF, but the local police would probably stay neutral (the National Directorate of Security would most likely side with the coup d'état as it was dominated by Tajiks). The presidential guard was 3rd Battalion, Afghan National Army, and assessed as loyal, while the Afghan army units training at Pol-e-Charki would most likely side with the transitional administration. The problem was that General Zemeray, the commander of the Afghan Army Brigade, was “a former protégé of the enemy faction.” The Pashtun militia units (Kabul Corps under Sher Alam Ibrahim) were assessed as loyal to the transitional administration. It was not clear to the KMNB planners what CJTF-180 would do.⁴⁷ Karzai's American security detail had good relations with Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) elements and would only communicate with the Canadians. They did not trust anybody else.⁴⁸

The other part of the plan was to mobilize all three KMNB battalions, and then move the Canadian LAV III company and the bulk of the other two Canadian companies down to ISAF HQ under cover of darkness.⁴⁹ This QRF would be prepared, on order, to establish a ring of steel around the Presidential Palace. Para, November, and Charles companies, scrambling to meet the timing, deployed in small groups from west Kabul through the passes to the large ISAF HQ compound where they were in place by 0600 hours on 17 September.⁵⁰

If push came to shove, the French battalion would hold Kabul Airport, while the German battalion and the rest of 3 RCR would cover the approaches to the Presidential Palace: the Germans to the northeast in PD 1, and the Canadians and the British company to the southeast and the palace itself. The Canadian light guns would cover everything.⁵¹ (See Figure 4-8)

MGen Leslie, meanwhile, contacted his American counterparts and discovered that there was a plan to have U.S. Air Force aircraft, including a B-1 bomber, and a U.S. Army AH-64 attack helicopter unit, conduct an aerial show of force. The helicopters swarmed around the city in the night and sonic booms were heard everywhere. When dawn came, MGen Leslie invited General Bari Ali, Fahim Khan's second-in-command, over to ISAF HQ for a cup of tea. MGen Leslie made sure, on their way to the coffee shop, that General Ali saw LAV IIIs

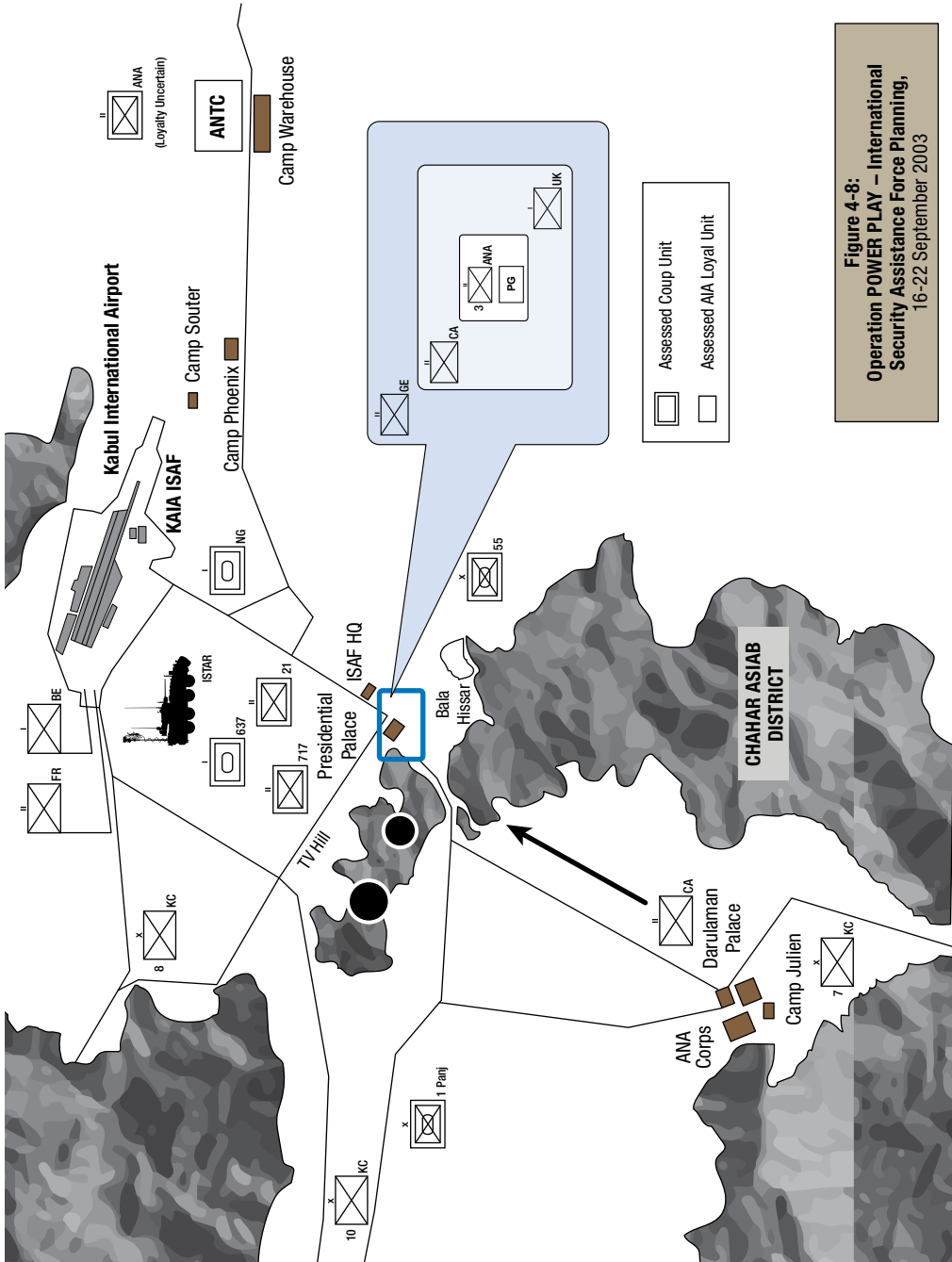


Figure 4-8:
Operation POWER PLAY – International
Security Assistance Force Planning,
 16-22 September 2003

Figure 4-8: Operation POWER PLAY – International Security Assistance Force Planning, 16-22 September 2003

and Coyotes lined up, ammunition being laid out, soldiers going through battle procedure, and bayonets being sharpened. Not a word was said. “It was made very clear that this would be a very expensive endeavour,” MGen Leslie noted in retrospect.⁵²

There were now seven AMF compounds under observation by ISTAR Company resources. The German LUNA unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were constantly overhead while the Canadian and German electronic warfare teams maintained a high alert level. Canadian forward observation officer parties identified targets within the compounds so they could be shelled by the guns if required. Particular attention was directed at the 55th Infantry Division and the 717th Infantry Regiment based in PD 1, located right downtown.⁵³ Tajik tanks that were starting to move around in their compounds suddenly stopped and returned to their parking positions. There was no further movement.

Operation POWER PLAY remained in place for the next nine days and then was stood down on 21 September 2003. The coup was thwarted without a shot being fired and with no loss of life. The Afghan Transitional Administration was saved and another civil war averted – for the time being. The Kabul Chief of Police was sacked because of his role in the land grab, while Karzai looked more carefully and with greater interest at what was euphemistically called “Ministry of Defence reform.”

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration; Heavy Weapons Cantonment; and ISAF Expansion

Next to Constitutional Loya Jirga security operations, the most critical project Canadian soldiers were involved in during 2003 was the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programme, which was designed to demobilize the AMF that swore allegiance to the various power brokers. It not only played a pivotal role in the short-term stability of Kabul, but also had strategic implications in the rest of the country. Additionally, the vortices that spun from the process influenced Canada’s future roles, missions and operations in Afghanistan for the next decade. Consequently, the complexity of DDR and its relationships requires some detailed discussion here because of how intertwined it became with several other problems.

The idea of a DDR process as part of the endgame for a war was not a new one. In Bosnia, removal of heavy weapons from Sarajevo in 1995 was considered a precursor for the Dayton peace process. Cantonment of heavy weapons, that is, their grouping in depots under guard by the international community, and the demobilization of the armies throughout Bosnia was implemented by the NATO-led Implementation Force in 1996 and enforced by the subsequent NATO-led Stabilization Force after 1997. A further refinement of these stabilization processes was developed in Kosovo: this was the concept of a ‘military technical agreement’ whereby belligerent forces formally agreed to disarmament, demobilization, and

reintegration in a phased fashion while under observation by the international stabilization force. A similar programme was established for Northern Ireland. Almost all of the ISAF leadership and most of the soldiers had some Balkans experience with these processes and understood their importance, particularly the Canadian officers.

The Bonn Agreement in 2001 provided for a military technical agreement in Kabul, but it was not enforced by the international community. The Bonn Agreement was not a peace treaty – it was an agreement between power brokers to stabilize and rebuild the country under a new government. ISAF was not a peacekeeping force; it existed to support the Afghan Transitional Administration. Technically, the Northern Alliance and the transitional administration were still in conflict with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The means to enforce a military technical agreement simply did not exist in 2002 or in 2003. That said, President Karzai fully supported DDR and made it a presidential decree in January 2003 that the Ministry of Defence and the UN decommission the Afghan militia formations and units. The United Nations Development Programme for Afghanistan, as administered by UNAMA, included DDR as one of its programmes and was responsible for funding and implementing it in partnership with the Afghan Transitional Administration. The mechanism for this was through the Afghan New Beginnings Programme, established in April 2003. Japan provided funding and was also supposed to provide leadership, but by August 2003 a combination of an inept UN military advisory staff in Kabul combined with “the bureaucratic games played by Japan to avoid any responsibility of actually doing something that requires work or assuming any element of risk” produced high levels of frustration at ISAF and CJTF-180. The Japanese contended that they would not release monies for the project until the Ministry of Defence had been reformed. Nothing had been accomplished at all.⁵⁴

As we have seen, MGen Leslie and his staff had already formulated a campaign plan for ISAF, which specifically included DDR as a crucial element to success. In mid-August 2003, MGen Leslie met with the British ambassador and Commander CJTF-180 in order to jump-start the DDR process. All participants recognized that disarming the militias was central to building up the legitimacy of the Afghan Transitional Administration in Kabul, but all could see that the process would eventually have to expand throughout Afghanistan. MGen Leslie headed the military aspects of implementation, drawing on Canadian campaign planning that had already taken place earlier in the year.

It was evident to Leslie and the Canadian planners that anything that could be done to reduce or remove any parallel power would improve the probability of survival for the transitional administration. The American forces and the Canadians in ISAF established informal working relationships while keeping UNAMA and the Japanese as titular heads of the DDR programme.⁵⁵

Crucial to the success of this endeavour was the need to build relationships not only between the Afghans but also between the members of the international community when it became clear that the UN was incapable of operationalizing DDR and the heavy weapons cantonment processes. At that time Canadian ambassador Chris Alexander played a significant role, working in partnership with MGen Leslie. The ability to get relevant members of the international community around one table and the Afghan Ministry of Defence around another, to garner the necessary resources and then provide linkage between the two groups to get movement on DDR was a significant achievement for both men, especially in the Kabul environment in 2003.

It is critical to note here that MGen Leslie, let alone Chris Alexander, would not have been able to wield this level of influence without the presence of 3 RCR Battalion Group, ISTAR Company, Canadian command of KMNB and the ability to provide logistic support for those forces. The synergy brought to bear by the Canadian units, not only by their presence in Kabul but by their demonstrable high level of professionalism and effectiveness, was the basis of this influence, not the mere presence of an embassy and the ability to dispense development aid monies through third-party intermediaries.

The DDR process was seen as a countrywide programme, but MGen Leslie and the Canadian planners realized early on that the consensual removal of heavy weapons from the capital was almost a separate problem from DDR. It was necessary for two reasons. First, a legitimate government had to be established as much as possible outside the coercive shadow of the militias still in Kabul through the upcoming Constitutional Loya Jirga. Second, once the transitional administration's legitimacy was demonstrably established in Kabul, not just on paper, the decommissioning of militia armies outside Kabul would in theory be progressively easier, particularly if it were accompanied by a strong information campaign. Recognizing the synergy between these two reasons, the issue was operationalization. The UN did not have the resources to identify and canton heavy weapons anywhere, let alone the capital. DDR's focus was on the militia soldiers themselves, not their equipment – after each formation and unit registered their personnel with the Afghan New Beginnings Programme, they were to be essentially paid off, given a certificate of good service, and sent home.

CHAPTER FOUR



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

CHAPTER FOUR



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-A012D



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-A010D

The various Northern Alliance factions were equipped with tanks, infantry combat vehicles, air defence systems, and rocket and tubed artillery. Heavy weapons cantonnement operations mounted by ISAF played a crucial role in reducing the ability of the AMF to coerce the Afghan political process.

Then there were the power brokers. How would they react to having their tanks, multiple rocket launchers, and anti-aircraft missiles taken away from them? In this part of the world, the possession of such items, regardless of their operational status, related to prestige as much as effectiveness. An Afghan commander may have 12 tanks, of which five were ‘runners,’ but for his ‘audience’ he had 12 tanks, while his rival might have seven. The Ministry of Defence, with its singular Afghan National Army Brigade, could not coerce the militia formations. Ostensibly, the militia formations reported to the Ministry of Defence, but everyone knew the Tajik-heavy Ministry of Defence had ‘special relationships’ with the Tajik militias. Karzai’s constant pressure on Ministry of Defence reform made them all nervous. This is why the project required a high level of finesse. Any slip and the city could plunge into the abyss of another civil war.

In effect, ISAF ran the heavy weapons cantonment programme, not the UN. Although cantonment started as a separate programme, it became intertwined with DDR. ISAF HQ identified and established three cantonment sites. Site 1 was at the Pol-e Charkhi training base across the road from KMNB HQ. Site 2 was in Chahar Asiab, and Site 3 was in Paghman, both of which were in the Canadian area of operations. (See Figure 4-9)

KMNB units and Afghan Army units had to identify and approach the AMF formations in units in their area and conduct surveys of their weapons stocks. Then each commander had to be approached via his chain of command, if it could be identified, through the Ministry of Defence, be briefed on what was happening, and establish an inventory and a transport schedule. Heavy-lift vehicles and tank transporters would then remove the heavy weapons to the cantonment sites, where in theory the Ministry of Defence would figure out what could be repaired and reused and what should be scrapped.⁵⁶ It was, in the words of MGen Leslie, “endless teas and dinners, almost shaming them into...holding parades where you would count your soldiers and get their names. Once you’ve got their names, and you’ve determined they are outside of the proscribed force levels of the Afghan Army, then you go back in a week or two and say: ‘Right, hand in your weapons. We’re holding a disarmament parade.’”⁵⁷

Heavy weapons cantonment placed a significant burden on ISAF. Every time a militia unit was decommissioned, there was a requirement for tank transporters (hired, borrowed, or liberated), substantial amounts of diesel fuel to propel them, an armed escort for the convoy, recovery assets in case anything broke down, public affairs support, and even drivers when required. The Canadian NSE for both of the early Operation ATHENA rotations provided significant support to the heavy weapons cantonment process with their resources.

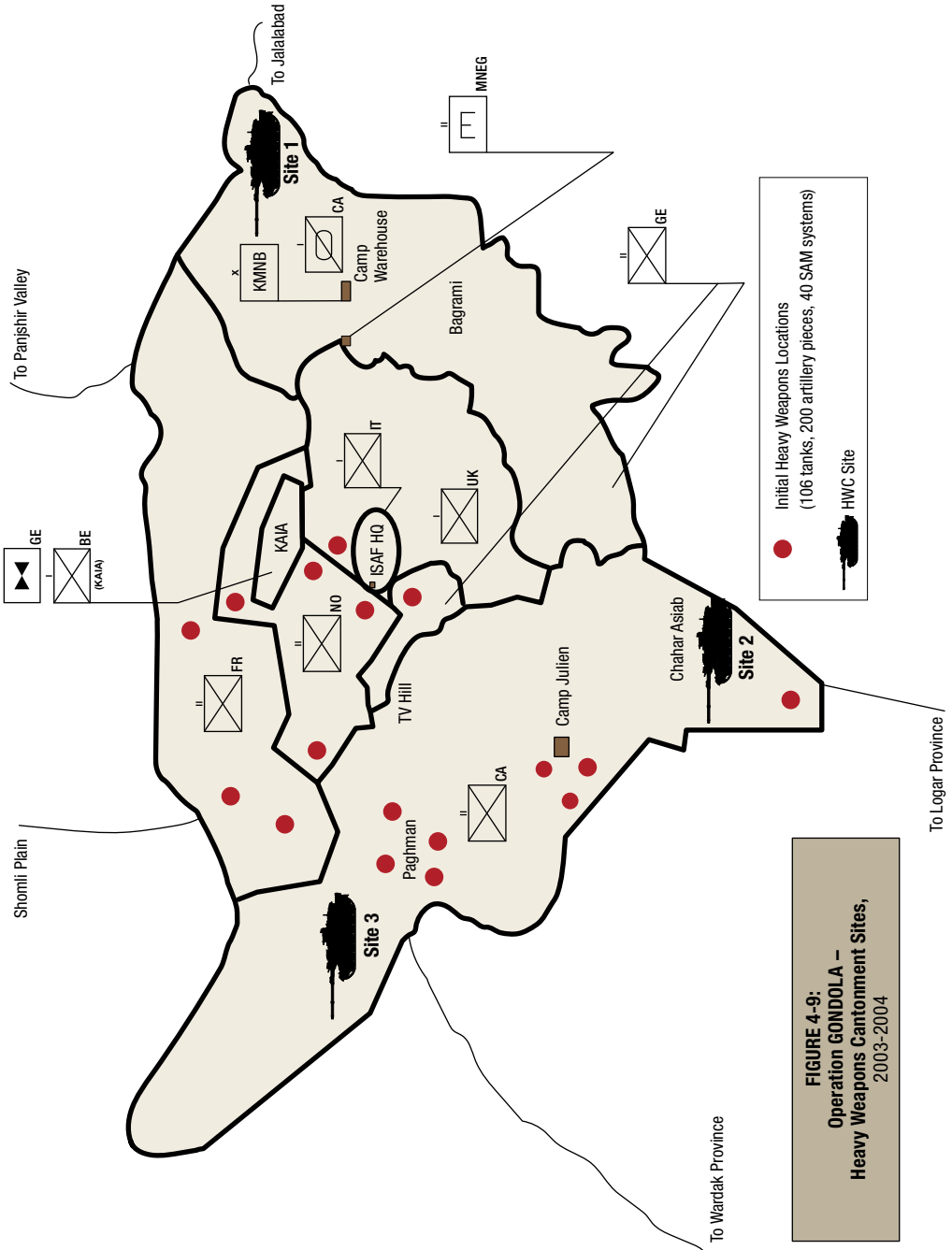


Figure 4-9: Operation GONDOLA – Heavy Weapons Cantonment Sites, 2003-2004

FIGURE 4-9:
Operation GONDOLA –
Heavy Weapons Cantonment Sites,
2003-2004

The heavy weapons cantonment schedule was ambitious – too ambitious, as it turned out as the process dragged into 2004. There was no way that all of the heavy weapons in Kabul would be cantoned before the Constitutional Loya Jirga. However, a perceptible psychological momentum followed from the cantonment initiative in the run-up to the loya jirga. If necessary, the discreet eye of ISTAR Company could linger in that direction while the role of the Afghan National Army in event security could be boosted in the public eye through the provision of some clean BMP vehicles, snappy uniforms, and disproportionate media attention directed at them. Enough of the weapons were cantoned to create the impression of increasing stability over the short term – and that was enough to stabilize the situation so that the Constitutional Loya Jirga could take place.

At the same time, the DDR process intersected with other processes: the future expansion of ISAF, the role of PRTs and DDR activities in the provinces. The idea of having two separate international coalitions for Afghanistan was making less and less sense as many players wanted ISAF to expand outside Kabul, yet there were substantial obstacles in every direction to some form of merger between ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM organizations. Broadly put, many European NATO members didn't want to be involved in United States-led 'counterinsurgency' and preferred to be part of a 'stabilization' force, even though both were authorized by UN mandate. Many European governments were minority governments and did not think they could survive politically if they were publicly involved in a "war" where there was "killing." Calling it something else and distancing that mission from "killing" was paramount to them. A secondary French-led aspect related to European opposition to the Anglo-American action against the Hussein regime in Iraq. Being part of a United States-led coalition in Afghanistan while refusing to join one in Iraq would have been a bit too mind-bending for some.⁵⁸

The Americans did not want the 'counterterrorism' part of the operation, specifically the part charged with hunting Al Qaeda high-value leadership targets, subject to interference from certain European NATO members, specifically the French. This related to the belief in many quarters that the French had compromised American special operations in Bosnia hunting war criminals and leaked air tasking order information to the Belgrade government during Operation ALLIED FORCE in 1999.⁵⁹

The impetus for NATO ISAF expansion came from several azimuths. President Hamid Karzai and Lakhdar Brahimi were two advocates. A third was Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. U.S. State Department personnel, including the American ambassador, opposed expansion and were shuffled out of the way, as was the leadership inside CJTF-180 who agreed with them. Indeed, there was a growing belief in many quarters that "the ATA under President Karzai may not survive, politically or physically, unless ISAF expands across the entirety of Afghanistan"⁶⁰ The European Commission leadership in Kabul also favoured expansion.

And several international aid organizations didn't want to work with the American-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and wanted ISAF to handle security. Many of these organizations stubbornly believed ISAF to be some form of UN peacekeeping force that they could morally align with so they could carry out their supposedly 'neutral' work.⁶¹

Designed by the American commands in Afghanistan toward the end of 2002, the PRTs became part of this debate; their role was to extend the authority of the transitional administration to the provinces by providing a basic liaison, coordination, assessment, and communication capability. In the areas where the Taliban and its allies were operating, these teams also had a targeting function for special operations and air strikes. Unfortunately, there were manning issues coupled with Rumsfeld's desire to have ISAF expand, and the Americans were looking at allies to take control of some of the teams. During this time, the concept of PRTs was in flux – some now saw them as a focal point for reconstruction aid delivery in addition to the existing functions. In the midst of trying to figure out what they would be used for and how, and who would command them, the idea that PRTs could play a role in disarmament and demobilization also emerged.

Parenthetically, PRTs were viewed by some NATO ISAF members, (particularly Germany but later Canada as well) as part of an 'exit strategy' to get their forces out of Kabul, which led to German-CJTF-180 bi-lateral discussions over taking the Konduz PRT. The idea that the Konduz team could assist with disarmament and demobilization had been raised by the Americans around this time, so it is difficult to see which came first: the chicken or the egg.

The question remained: who would command the PRTs? ISAF? Operation ENDURING FREEDOM? A merged ISAF/OEF command? There was no easy or quick answer, as all of the national factors discussed earlier were in play. There were many who wanted to expand ISAF, but were interested in committing some other nations' forces to do it rather than their own. Matters came to a head in October 2003 when ISAF informed NATO that ISAF could not expand outside Kabul if NATO could not find enough forces to rotate command of Kabul airport. As well, there was the need to get a UN Security Council mandate change for ISAF before anyone could even seriously consider expansion. This was achieved fairly rapidly by mid-October in NATO circles and then at the UN Security Council after the Chinese threw their weight behind it. On 13 October 2003, the Security Council voted unanimously to expand the ISAF mission beyond Kabul in Resolution 1510. But no one wanted to commit forces – other than the Germans to Konduz.⁶²

There was a certain irony when U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld bestowed praise on ISAF during a visit and declared that a NATO-led ISAF was "exactly right" for Afghanistan. ISAF's approach in Kabul was heavily influenced by NATO's involvement with the UN Protection Force, the Implementation and Stabilization Forces, the Kosovo Force and Macedonian operations, experience that Rumsfeld so derided early in his tenure as

Secretary of Defense.⁶³ At the same time, his derision regarding “old Europe” was justified given the immense effort expended on quibbling over the minutiae and sensitivities related to ISAF expansion. The European nations, with millions of people (over one million in uniform) and trillions of dollars, could not raise 500 personnel to run Kabul Afghanistan International Airport. In addition, the UN, with all of its experience in peacekeeping and disarmament, could not run a disarmament and reintegration programme. How could both institutions handle a protracted terrorist campaign directed at them designed to interfere with their stabilization activities?

Terrorism and Improvised Explosive Devices

Terrorism in Kabul was not new when the Canadian-led KMNB arrived in August 2003. There had been rocket attacks and mine strikes directed against ISAF since its inception. The first IED attack against ISAF occurred in September 2002, but the devices became more sophisticated by March 2003 when the first remote control device was discovered. By May 2003, command wire devices were in use in Kabul. The first vehicle-borne IEDs were employed in September 2002 and then in June 2003 with spectacular results against a German convoy.⁶⁴ The number of IED attacks was relatively small compared to the Canadian experience in southern Afghanistan after 2005, but the use of these devices was somewhat novel for Canadian troops and commanders (let alone Canadian media and the politicians).⁶⁵

The question was: who was doing it and why? There were plenty of munitions lying around the city and environs, and plenty of citizens suffering from various forms of mental disorders or the need to get revenge. If no organization took credit for an attack, it was difficult to conclude that such attack was “messaging” to ISAF or the international community on behalf of aggrieved groups or leaders.

Canadian forces operating in Kabul had to contend with several organizations seeking the disruption of the transitional authority, some of which were anti-Taliban, some of which were pro-Taliban. There were Taliban remnants and sympathizers in the city, but the Taliban insurgency was in its infancy in the fall of 2003. Indeed, Mullah Omar convened his first shuras in mid- to late-2003 – one in Peshawar, Pakistan, and the other in Quetta, Pakistan. The Quetta Shura would eventually become the command structure for the insurgency that Canada would confront from 2005 to 2011 in the south, while the Peshawar Shura was one of a number of antagonists in Kabul and the surrounding provinces.

Throughout early September 2003, the Canadian All Source Intelligence Centre (ASIC) and ISTAR Company received nearly daily reports of Taliban-associated activity. These tended to emanate from the Chahar Asiab district and Logar province, with repeated warnings of vehicle-borne IED deployment. There were also reports that Anwar Dangar,

formerly a commander in the Northern Alliance associated with Fahim Khan who defected to the Taliban and was among the top Taliban “Most Wanted,” was recruiting for the Taliban cause in western Kabul.⁶⁶

The more prominent terrorist threat to ISAF at this time was, however, not the Taliban per se but the fundamentalist HiG organization led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. HiG was one of the original anti-communist jihad groups from the 1980s favoured by the Pakistani security services. HiG was responsible for instigating much of the violence in Kabul in 1992-1993 when Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was excluded from the power-sharing arrangements put in place after the defeat of the Najibullah regime. He sided with the Taliban after 1996 and became an antagonist of the Northern Alliance, particularly of Ahmed Shah Massoud, his Mujahideen rival from the 1980s. Even though HiG tended to be Pashtun in ethnicity, it had many supporters in Maidan Shar in Wardak province, and to the south in Logar province.

HiG was thought to be responsible for most of the terrorist activity against ISAF in late 2002 and throughout 2003. Consequently, it attracted a lot of attention from a variety of specialized Afghan-based counterterrorist forces, ISAF and non-ISAF, particularly after the German bus bombing in June. Consequently, Afghan security forces, with ISAF and other coalition elements in support, were able to take down a number of primary HiG cell leaders in Kabul on 19 August, 31 August and 26 September 2003. They narrowly missed the attack planner, an individual named Mamor Malang.⁶⁷ The 31 August takedown was significant in that it bagged a HiG commander named Mohammad Qalamuddin (“Qalam”), who had been a HiG commander in Sarobi district back in the 1980s. Canadian ISTAR Company resources acquired Qalam and tracked him, the British infantry company set up a cordon, and the National Directorate of Security arrested him and three associates. Explosive-making material and weapons were found with Qalam.⁶⁸

Hekmatyar, an extremely ruthless but politically astute individual, desperately wanted to become the player he once thought he was on the Afghan political scene. He would ally with anybody that would feed these ambitions. HiG had representatives with Mullah Omar’s Peshawar Shura and maintained supply, recruiting, and training facilities in north-west Pakistan. Some believed him to be a Pakistani security services asset sent in to stir the pot in Kabul and interfere with the Afghan Transitional Administration stabilization process. In reality, as the Taliban sidelined HiG as the main Pakistani asset, this likely stimulated Hekmatyar to prove himself and save face.⁶⁹ On one occasion, one of their bomb makers blew himself up while preparing a device that was supposed to kill President Karzai, and there were other suspected misfires. By the end of September 2003, reports made their way to ISAF that Mullah Omar was frustrated with HiG’s ineffectiveness and had had a confrontation with Hekmatyar in order to motivate him.⁷⁰

The Short/Beerenfenger Killings and their Aftermath, 2 October 2003

The increased threat warnings related to the possible deployment of vehicle-borne and remote-controlled IEDs on ISAF's main service routes between Camp Warehouse, Kabul Airport, the headquarters, and Camp Julien. The KMNB Military Police Company, working with ISTAR Company, prepared Contingency Operation AEGIS, which then became Operation BASEBALL. This operation established overt and covert observation posts covering the supply routes looking for IED cells emplacing devices or keeping a lookout for suspect vehicles. The general idea was to deter enemy activity, identify the players when they complained about lack of opportunities, and then track the players back to their leaders.

Over in west Kabul, 3 RCR continued with its framework operations in the PDs. In addition, LCol Denne remained concerned about the rural areas of the western districts and their linkages to routes west through the valleys into Wardak province and Logar province to the south. There were a number of issues. First, these areas had been generally unpatrolled by ISAF prior to the arrival of 3 RCR, so there was little knowledge about who was there, what they were up to or who they were aligned with. Second, terrorists, narcotics smugglers, or other anti-Afghan Transitional Administration elements did not recognize the artificial boundary established as the limit of the ISAF area of operations.

3 RCR mounted Operation WOLVERINE to gather information on those areas. WOLVERINE was sequential: the western district was broken down into sub-sectors A through E. Recce Platoon, with a forward observation officer/forward air controller and engineer support, patrolled into those areas to demonstrate an overt presence. WOLVERINE was stood down for a time while Operation POWER PLAY was the focus of operations, but it came back into full swing again afterwards. Another operation, GRIZZLY, was essentially an extension of WOLVERINE.⁷¹ Of interest were a number of valleys and re-entrants southwest of Camp Julien, including the Jowz Valley. Patrols from 3 RCR moved about gathering local information, while CIMIC teams examined the possibility of extending aid projects to the populations in those areas. These were wild and desolate areas, with sparser populations the further away the patrols got from west Kabul. Roads were unpaved and amounted to goat tracks in many places.

On 2 October 2003, a Canadian Iltis vehicle was blown up during a patrol in the Jowz Valley. Sgt Robert Short and Cpl Robbie Beerenfenger were killed and three others wounded. While the media focused on the unsuitability of the Iltis as a patrol vehicle, the Canadian contingent mourned the loss of two soldiers. 24 Field Squadron's EOD experts moved to the site to assess what had happened. They determined that one or more Soviet TM 57 anti-tank mines plus another device had destroyed the Iltis and killed its crew. The device was situated in a wheel rut on the trail. The engineers had proved the route

previously, that is, it was a known route. The day before, a Bison ambulance and an engineer truck had driven south to north on the trail, and a LAV III, a Bison ambulance, an engineer truck, and two Iltis vehicles had also traversed the route earlier. The engineers concluded that the mines had been laid in the time between the convoys passing over the area and that it was not a “legacy” mine.⁷²



Photo Credit: DND KA2003-A358D

The gargantuan Zettelmeyer front-end loader was certified capable of counter-mine warfare under certain conditions. This one struck a mine during a route clearance operation in western Kabul.

The killings were deemed a “mine strike” to reduce public uproar in part because it took time to decipher the Byzantine motives behind the attack. Short and Beerenfenger were murdered in a contract killing orchestrated by HiG. The killers were paid between \$5 000 and \$10 000 for the operation. One school of thought was that increased Canadian patrols in western districts had interfered with narcotics smuggling and that this was a message to get the Canadians to back off. Another school of thought was that the killings were contracted by someone in the AMF who did not want AMF units demobilized. If, in theory, there were still a threat to Kabul, the AMF would not be disbanded. The third theory was that this action was from those behind the coup attempt and it was payback for Operation POWER PLAY. MGen Leslie privately concluded that “this was a politically-motivated premeditated attack for which the murderers were financially compensated.”⁷³

LCol Denne wanted to mount a clearance operation, Operation OVERTHROW, into the Jowz Valley to demonstrate that Canada could maintain the psychological high ground and would not be deterred from patrolling western districts. OVERTHROW had covert

recce teams infiltrate at night into hides to observe the valley. Then an engineer package would clear the route for Para Company and Quebec Company. The covert part of the operation went in on 7 October 2003. The main effort for OVERTHROW, however, kept being delayed because of other activity in the city. Then on 29 October when the engineers went in to clear the route, a Zettelmeyer armoured earthmover struck a mine and was disabled, shaking up the driver, but not wounding or killing him. Operation OVERTHROW was suspended.⁷⁴

The Short and Beerenfenger killings prompted 3 RCR to review its dispositions and equipment. A request went in for the deployment of more Bison eight-wheeled armoured personnel carriers, while the companies equipped with Iltis Jeeps were restricted to hard pack roads in the city. Charles Company with its LAV III vehicles took up the slack in the western districts, but only up to a point since these vehicles were required in the event of further unpleasantness with the militias in the city.⁷⁵

The hunt was now on for those responsible for the killings, but it would take time to determine who the specific perpetrators were. An ongoing United Kingdom–United States operation focusing on HiG leadership was briefed to ISAF prior to the 2 October killings, so by coincidence, ISAF was able to take advantage of the situation. On the night of 7 October, actionable intelligence was received on the possible location of Abu Bakr, the main HiG commander in the Kabul region (who was, incidentally, a Tajik). This was transmitted to KMNB HQ and ISTAR Company deployed resources to observe the location, which was in the British area of operations. Once the Kabul City Police was alerted, the United Kingdom company formed the outer cordon, the Afghan police went in, and Abu Bakr was arrested.⁷⁶

ISAF kept its ears open for any more information on the 2 October attack. A source indicated that Anwar Dangar was involved in some way, that he had apparently brought mines with him into western districts in late August in order to go after ISAF targets.⁷⁷ 3 RCR nearly dropped everything to go after anything HiG-related in its area of operations. On 14 October, reports came in from local sources developed by Canadian resources that Dangar was in Chaki Wardak Village where he met with three Taliban sub-commanders. A Taliban operative who transported remote detonators and distributed them to the insurgents met Dangar.⁷⁸ Then, on 28 October, human intelligence teams and the Canadian ASIC tracked those responsible for the attack to Logar province, which was, unfortunately, outside ISAF's area of operations.⁷⁹ Dangar's role was now less than clear.

The problem was that 3 RCR and KMNB had only so many resources. LCol Denne had to strike the right balance between mounting a protracted rural counterinsurgency operation as a force protection measure and maintaining urban patrolling to keep the districts stable and at the same time keep an eye on Sayyaf's militia. Operation FOXHOUND,

the PD 5 and PD 14 surge operation, had been on hold because of POWER PLAY and now because of OVERTHROW. One personality of interest appeared to be central to events, but there might be more. Should the battalion group focus solely on Dangar? Or should ISTAR Company? How many of ISTAR Company's resources should be tasked for such an operation? LCol Denne and his staff would continue to juggle their resources throughout October and November in the run-up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga.⁸⁰

There was more fallout from the Bakr seizure. The National Directorate of Security was miffed because the police were involved and tried to muddy the waters by arguing that the man seized was not Abu Bakr. ISTAR sources reported that HiG was preparing retaliation against ISAF for Bakr's arrest. HiG and the Taliban subsequently mounted a propaganda campaign against the transitional administration and ISAF in Kabul's mosques. ISAF's information operations people had not anticipated such a move as they had not viewed religious institutions as an avenue for messaging. As a result, BGen Devlin started to meet regularly with the religious leaders in the city in order to build relationships and to counter insurgent messaging.⁸¹

By early November 2003, a British source (which was not part of ISAF and did not flow into their process) informed MGen Leslie that information was available on the future movements of the 2 October killers. It was possible that they might come back into the city as part of the Bakr payback operation. MGen Leslie asked NDHQ for release authority to use CANSOF to handle the detention. A plan was put in place to have a Canadian rifle platoon from Para Company act as the entry force while supported by a Gurkha company. As there was no Canadian detainee facility, the British would handle the terrorists once they were apprehended. This operation, Operation CUTAWAY, went on six-hour notice to move on 14 November. An associated operation, Operation VICTOR, which involved a possible out-of-area seizure of a HiG target west of the western districts by Charles Company, was put on eight-hour notice to move.⁸² The next day, British handlers determined that their source was probably dead. Operation CUTAWAY was put on hold, pending the re-appearance of the targets.⁸³

ISAF Security Coordination with the Afghan Transitional Administration

The events surrounding Operation POWER PLAY highlighted for ISAF commanders the ongoing problems of having too many armies and too many power brokers in competition with the Afghan Transitional Administration, the only organization in Kabul that the international community formally deemed legitimate. The power brokers had ostensibly agreed to adopt this state of affairs back in November 2001 in the Bonn Agreement, but they were only adhering to the letter of the agreement and not the spirit of it. The UN- and Japanese-led DDR process was already stalling out when the Canadians hit the ground

in August, and while the French, British, and Americans were making some progress in training the Afghan National Army, it was in no position to challenge the power brokers and their mechanized forces. Something had to be done to link the new army with the government, and to shift the allegiance of, or convert, the militia forces so they could not be used to support parallel power structures not only in Kabul but throughout the country.

At issue were the command and control arrangements for the Afghan Ministry of Defence. At the start of the Canadian involvement in Kabul, the ‘Ministry of Defence’ was a convenient term for a collection of Afghan militia generals, their forces, and their benefactors. When Hamid Karzai challenged these individuals over the “land grab” in September, he decided to reform the Ministry of Defence to prevent future insubordination by reducing the number of Tajik commanders. There were concerns that introducing “ethnic balance” to the Ministry of Defence would slow down the DDR process even further – already a power broker in Parwan was making noises that he wasn’t going to go along with having his heavy weapons taken away.⁸⁴

At the same time, Minister Jalali was having issues with the Ministry of the Interior. Did the Ministry of the Interior control the National Directorate of Security? To what extent did they have control over, or the allegiance of, police district commanders in Kabul? There appeared to be no parallel programme like DDR to deal with the police.

The upcoming Constitutional Loya Jirga was going to require an immense security operation to protect it from outside interference. These security operations had to have an Afghan face, otherwise the impression that Karzai was an international community puppet protected by international troops would be exploited by all and sundry. This was commonly understood by those involved with the process. Bringing together the Afghan security forces leadership with the UN and ISAF was one way of achieving both aims. Consequently, ISAF gently proposed to Minister Jalali that he establish a Joint Security Coordination Centre.⁸⁵ At the same time, MGen Leslie made the rounds in Kabul to get a variety of antagonistic individuals on side, while BGen Devlin did the same at the street level. The Joint Security Coordination Centre was up and running by 25 September.

On 2 October 2003, former militia officers protesting their release held the first of many demonstrations at the Ministry of Defence office.⁸⁶ It was not clear if these demonstrations were orchestrated political pressure or spontaneous events, but they posed some concerns not only over continued DDR operations but regarding the tactics being employed by various power brokers. ISAF developed information that there were meetings held on 26 September and 5 October led by Rabbani and Sayyaf. Abdullah, Bismillah Khan, Fahim Khan, Taj Mohammad Wardak, and Yunis Qanuni also participated. The purpose of the meetings was to organize a propaganda campaign designed to weaken Hamid Karzai’s credibility and then promote Rabbani as the future (and fundamentalist) leader

of Afghanistan. One part of the plan involved targeting the DDR process because the power brokers did not want to lose control of their armies.⁸⁷

To what extent the fundamentalists among these men interacted with the fundamentalists of the Taliban or HiG through intermediaries during this time remains open to speculation. It was imperative at the time that the DDR process be reinvigorated to reduce the threat of military power, which could be brought to bear on the Afghan Transitional Administration and the upcoming Constitutional Loya Jirga process.

Hamid Karzai made his move and by 16 October, the Ministry of Defence was restructured with 22 newly appointed leaders. General Abdul Rahim Wardak (a Pashtun) became the Deputy Minister, while Bismillah Khan (a Tajik) became the Chief of Defence. Fahim Khan remained the Minister, but he and Bismillah Khan were long-term antagonists so all three balanced each other out.⁸⁸ With a reformed Ministry of Defence and linkages between the various security services around the city, the likelihood of success for DDR and the Constitutional Loya Jirga increased.

In the wake of the Ministry of Defence success, UNAMA raised the issue of “initiatives aimed at boosting [the transitional administrations’] governance structure” with ISAF. UNAMA complained that “major problems continue to exist due to a lack of communication and coordination among various Afghan Transitional Administration ministries and the absence of a comprehensive indication of the financial implications attached to running the government.” One idea raised in this meeting was the possibility of having a ‘Policy Management Unit’ back up Cabinet in order to “identify strategic objectives and coordinate the activities of various ministries, with the intent of preserving specific competencies while achieving broad coherence at the policy level.”⁸⁹ UNAMA tried but failed to implement this idea effectively in the long term. There were others who discreetly requested help, like Abdul Karimi in the Ministry of Justice, who was not getting as much help from the Italians as he needed. “There is an increasing tendency by the Afghan institutions to seek ISAF’s good offices in order to overcome political sensitivities or adjust uneven power politics, so that reform endeavours can move forward. ISAF should not be drawn into internal political intricacies. However, by being perceived as a reliable and effective third party, ISAF can use its leverage to bolster inter-ministerial communication.”⁹⁰ Hamid Karzai would approach the Canadian Army’s ISAF contingent in 2004 to provide such an organization. It would eventually deploy in 2005 and be called the Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan.

Canada’s Embedded Training Team and the Afghan National Army

A key component in creating a legitimate Afghan national army to offset the militia forces was Task Force PHOENIX, the American-led Afghan National Army pillar of the Bonn Agreement. This organization consisted of American, British, and French trainers

seconded from their Operation ENDURING FREEDOM contingents. TF Phoenix operated under the command of Combined Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF), an American command under Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan (OMC-A), and as such was not part of ISAF. The camp for the 1st Afghan National Army Brigade was under construction next to Camp Julien and TF Phoenix was looking for facilities for several American Embedded Training Teams (ETTs). The Canadian contingent at CJCMOTF had an informal request from the Americans to see if the ETTs could live in Camp Julien.⁹¹ MGen Leslie supported this in order to simplify the defensive plan for Camp Julien, but also to improve relations with American forces operating around Kabul as there were issues with the coordination of several coalitions operating in the city.⁹²

A number of other factors coincided that drew Canada into helping train the Afghan army in 2003. This in turn led to Canada's deep involvement with Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams in the 2006-2011 period and beyond. First, the Canadian officers that were part of CJCMOTF were looking toward having Canadian Military Training and Assistance Plan programme support for TF Phoenix. Second, the planners in Ottawa in discussions with MGen Leslie were already looking at an exit strategy for Kabul – the PRT was one path, but involvement in Afghan National Army training might be another. Assisting with TF Phoenix in some fashion would keep Canada's options open in Afghanistan.⁹³

When the TF PHOENIX team visited Camp Julien to assess its laydown facilities, they informally asked if Canada wanted to join TF PHOENIX with an Embedded Training Team to help out with the 1st Afghan National Army Brigade. Col Hodgson thought this was a good idea and raised it with MGen Leslie, who was right in the middle of Operation POWER PLAY. The need to have a viable national army was highlighted during these events. Some organization had to replace the AMF not only in Kabul but eventually throughout the country, as the “formation of the ANA is a critical piece of the future viability of the central government. The establishment of a safe and secure environment throughout Afghanistan hinges upon the Afghan National Army becoming an independent organization and viable presence throughout the country.”⁹⁴

There was some internal debate. The DCDS staff in Ottawa did not want forward commanders committing Canada to things that might have larger implications. One of these involved the possibility that Afghan Army battalions (*kandaks*) might have to deploy outside Kabul with their trainers, whether to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or the Afghan Transitional Administration as it set out enforcing DDR. Ottawa was assured that TF Phoenix was “not associated with CJTF-180 and has no offensive role whatsoever.” The Canadians in Kabul reminded Ottawa that part of ISAF's mandate was to help train Afghan Army units anyway and Canada was being asked to help.⁹⁵

The DCDS concurred but insisted that no additional personnel or money would be sent to support this initiative. It had to come from TF Kabul resources. The Canadian commanders examined the problem after sounding out their American counterparts and determined that 20 officers and non-commissioned members could be made available. There would be three mentors per company, with four companies, plus six staff members and two team leaders. The aim was “to coach, teach, and mentor the leadership of 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade.”⁹⁶

The Canadian ETT was formerly established on 7 October 2003. ETT members wore arid CADPAT uniforms to distinguish themselves from ISAF troops wearing green uniforms and Afghan Army troops, who wore green woodland camouflage uniforms. With a focus on individual and collective training, the Canadian ETT geared the Kandak’s training toward providing security for the Constitutional Loya Jirga as opposed to, say, mechanized operations. On occasion, F Battery joined the Canadian ETT to assist with mortar training. All Canadians had to familiarize themselves with the Afghans’ plethora of Chinese and Soviet small arms and support weapons.

The Canadian ETT had to adjust to how 1st Kandak was organized and led. 1st Kandak was established in 2002 and had approximately 360 personnel. The Afghan battalion’s leadership was mostly made up of Mujahideen fighters from the 1980s, while some of the soldiers had experience with one or the other factional armies in the late 1990s. As Canadian ETT Capt Michael Chagnon pointed out, “They had no doctrine, standardized tactics or set standards, and had been subjected to a variety of training first from U.S. reserve special forces, then British trainers, then American ETTs from 10th Mountain Division.” It was as if the Canadian ETT was starting from scratch. The Afghans took well to range training with a variety of weapons but non-commissioned officer/officer interaction left much to be desired. That said, the Canadian ETT, with infinite patience, settled in to help the Afghans improve their lot and prepare to protect the fledgling state.⁹⁷

Spin-off benefits at the strategic level of the Canadian contribution to TF Phoenix included the anomaly that the Canadian contingent was from ISAF, not Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, though this would change the following year when Operation ARCHER was stood up as a separate mission to encompass the Canadian ETTs and other Canadian involvement with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. NATO staffs at AFNORTH congratulated themselves for having such foresight to develop an “in” with TF Phoenix.⁹⁸

During this time, 3 RCR looked to take on a similar mission with the local Afghan police. This was not formalized as a separate operation, even though the Germans were responsible for training and organizing the Afghan police as part of the Bonn Agreement. LCol Denne and his staff noted that an improved police force in the Canadian area of

operations would have a positive benefit on all levels of the operation: improve coordination, increase legitimacy, and get the police away from the power brokers. 3 RCR worked up a training plan where each company would run a six-day course for 20 to 25 Kabul City Police officers, each in their districts, and then build from there. The courses focused on running vehicle checkpoints, basic communication and organization, and the passage of information. It was a modest but effective programme and, as with the Afghan National Army training, it improved security for the upcoming Constitutional Loya Jirga.⁹⁹

Civil-Military Operations: Civil-Military Cooperation, Canadian International Development Agency, and Development

The 3 RCR CIMIC platoon, deployed immediately to assess the Canadian operating area. After two weeks of work, the teams discovered that almost all of the wells drilled by aid organizations in the Western districts were dry. The initial report to ISAF HQ noted that “this could be an indication that well projects are not coordinated with the appropriate ministries or organizations.”¹⁰⁰ As it turned out, this was a massive understatement. At the same time, CIMIC teams from Norway that were part of the KMNB CIMIC group moved about the Canadian area of operations without informing 3 RCR. There was a CIMIC Coordination Centre at KMNB HQ. Where was the coordination? As it turned out, there had not been any coordination on previous KMNB rotations, so the new KMNB HQ set out to correct the matter.¹⁰¹

The main issue was the lack of a clear division of labour between the brigade and battalion levels, the brigade and the force, the force and the government, and the force and the Non-Governmental Organizations. There were hundreds of aid organizations in Kabul; few attempted to coordinate with the Afghanistan Transitional Administration and just did their own thing. Few wanted to coordinate with ISAF at any level – operational or tactical as they viewed themselves as ‘neutral’ and the UN-mandated security force as ‘belligerent.’

The Afghan Transitional Administration, on the other hand, was in the process of creating a national approach to development throughout 2003 and this approach would not be unveiled for some time, so even if the aid organizations wanted to coordinate their efforts, there was no place to plug into other than the UN and its organs. Then there were UN entities or personalities that thought that they should handle development for the Afghan Transitional Administration and established what amounted to ‘aid competition’ with the transitional administration.

Though not new to the Canadian Army, CIMIC was still struggling to find a proper fit in the institution. There was no CIMIC trade and, for the most part, CIMIC officers were reserve personnel trained for the task and brought together in ad hoc fashion for each mission. There were no CIMIC units. LCol Denne’s foresight and acceptance of the need

for CIMIC notwithstanding, others in the Army were not fully convinced of the efficacy of CIMIC, and it had never really received attention in the higher education institution of the Army. This outlook was in part a hold-over from the Cold War where CIMIC consisted of a handful of officers in 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in West Germany who drove around and paid for manoeuvre damage during FALLEX and drank beer with German town mayors. In Kosovo, there was a single battalion CIMIC officer with the deployed battle group. Operation APOLLO also had a single CIMIC officer.

The 3 RCR CIMIC platoon, on the other hand, did ground-breaking work in Kabul with a full platoon. CIMIC's purpose, simply put, was to build good will with the local people and then provide an environment where those people were more likely to interact with the security forces to provide information on anti-government activities like crime and terrorism which in turn, as security improved, benefitted them as much as the security forces. That good will consisted of the identification of the needs for a local community, discussions with the leaders of the community about how to address those needs, and the provision of some support to assist the population in addressing the most pressing problems that would have the greatest community impact.

The distinction between CIMIC projects and developmental aid provided by international, national, and non-governmental aid organizations was seriously blurred in the Kabul environment, something which antagonized supposedly 'neutral' aid agencies who saw CIMIC as 'biased' and 'pro-war' – the debate as to the neutrality of developmental aid in a war was not developed enough at this point to countervail such arguments. This problem would play out on a larger scale in the debates over PRTs in 2003–2005.

That said, CIMIC platoon was able to identify and establish 74 projects that could assist the population and support force protection measures in the Canadian area of operations. They were all fundamental things required by any community: clean water; housing and shelter for the police; housing of the educational system and supplies for schools; and medical supplies for local-level medical care.¹⁰² Unfortunately, only 18 of those 74 projects were completed by December 2003 because the Canadian International Development Agency blocked the aid money.

That situation related to the problematic issue of Canada's approach to CIMIC interaction regarding developmental aid and the role development was supposed to play in Canada's strategy toward Afghanistan. As seen with Operation APOLLO, CIDA was not interested in assisting the 3 PPCLI Battle Group; it forced 3 PPCLI to conduct ad hoc development aid with force protection around Kandahar Air Field. For Operation ATHENA, things were supposed to be different.

Prior to Operation ATHENA, the Canadian International Development Agency was virtually forced by its elected masters to allocate development money to Afghanistan.¹⁰³

When negotiations between the elected government of Canada and CIDA were complete, they agreed that the money would be spent in a convoluted fashion. A tranche of \$250 000 was supposed to be given to 3 RCR and spent through CIMIC; the funds were to be given by CIDA to NATO to give to ISAF HQ.¹⁰⁴ As it turned out, there was no bureaucratic mechanism to move the Canadian money to NATO, to AFNORTH, and then to ISAF. NATO staff marveled at the Canadian collectivist ‘naïveté’ and took pains to let the Canadian commanders in Kabul know it.¹⁰⁵ To make up the shortfall, MGen Leslie directed that TF Kabul operations and maintenance funds to the tune of \$300 000 be made available for CIMIC operations. The Canadian CIMIC platoon identified and prioritized a variety of projects, most of them associated with achieving force protection through local engagement, and set about implementing them. Canadian media mistakenly reported those projects as CIDA projects, which annoyed the soldiers. In a report back to Canada, the DCDS was informed in September that “we have not yet received one penny from CIDA” and he was warned that when the media started asking questions, Canadians in Kabul would tell the truth and something “may be getting lost at levels below the Ministers et al, specifically within CIDA.” Notably, “We do not have time to wait for each individual project to be approved by CIDA Ottawa. The sums are far too low and small to justify the current Byzantine process and we may be back in Canada and the mission concluded before being allowed by CIDA to spend a dime.”¹⁰⁶

Incredibly, elements in NDHQ in Ottawa investigated whether it was legally acceptable to allow operations and maintenance money to be used for force protection via CIMIC. Fortunately, the DCDS supported the forward commander and threw back at the financial people that there was a lack of clear Canadian Forces policy on CIMIC.¹⁰⁷

By October, nothing had been accomplished. “I am beginning to believe this was a very bad idea,” DComd ISAF reported. By mid-October, after the killings of Short and Beerenfenger and the dramatically increased need to connect with the population to gain information on enemy movements, there was still no movement. MGen Leslie threatened to raise the matter with the Prime Minister during his visit but was instructed not to.¹⁰⁸ It was nothing short of exasperating. The Canadians in Kabul needed monies for a critical task, monies that were identified and allocated, but could not be accessed. The frustration is worth quoting at length:

This whole process makes us look like members of the cast of a remarkably exaggerated session of “Yes, Minister.” My proposed message to CIDA is quite simple...Us semi-literate ground apes want money to dig deep holes for water and fix smashed schools so locals not hurt us and we do good. You give money to us, we use to make life better for poor people. This makes big boss of Canada happy. This makes us happy. This makes locals happy. You CIDA persons get off derriere and give us small bag of gold toot-sweet (bilingual content for extra points) or we think nasty

thoughts about you for two hands of years.' To put this in context we are asking for and have been told that we are expecting to get one tenth of one percent of the CIDA funds allocated for Afghanistan...Apparently (unconfirmed) the CIDA minister has retained approval for each project, no matter how big or small, under her exclusive control. This may explain some of the bottlenecks. The situation is approaching critical....¹⁰⁹

By mid-November, still nothing: "Words fail me...DND trains for violence as a last resort so as to impose the will of the nation. CIDA needs violence in the first instance so that the will of the nation will apply to them."¹¹⁰ The CIDA representative in Kabul was replaced with the high-energy and collegial Nipa Bannerjee, but even Bannerjee was unable to gain traction in Ottawa. It was in January 2004 that there was some movement:

We are past being cumbersome and into the ponderous stage. The very unfair and certainly unjustified mental image that springs to mind when considering these two institutions negotiating/communicating on this issue is much akin to two elephants engaged in the procreative act. Much bellowing, flapping of ears, incomprehensible grunts, trampling of innocent bystanders and voila, 22 months later something loud, ugly, and smelly with a big nose is brought into the world....When I get some time to think, my interest will be in trying to find the match-maker that set this whole silly idea in motion...I know who played what role within NDHQ as is true within CIDA. Somewhere in DFAIT, though, is some person who just had to find a harder way. Where is my elephant gun?¹¹¹

The negative tone of the CIDA/Canadian Forces relationship, established in the early days of the conflict by those leading CIDA, would continue for several years whenever Canadian interdepartmental issues were raised. Simply put, there were serious issues with CIDA in the Ottawa bureaucratic environment. The various elected Canadian governments over the years simply did not assert effective leadership over CIDA, a government department spending Canadian taxpayers' money. The problems with CIDA and development in Afghanistan that emerged later in the conflict were not new and were noted half a decade earlier in Afghanistan. This had long-term effects on the Canadian effort in Kandahar later on.

Also prefiguring events five years later, Canadian Army CIMIC teams in Kabul went above and beyond the resources they had to get the job done. Enabled by the force commander and the DCDS, CIMIC was able to implement a significant number of projects in west Kabul, such as a water reservoir and pump house with potable water for all, 10 potable wells in surrounding districts, several local employment programmes at Camp Julien, the provision of school equipment and small school repair, assistance with health

services in the Jowz Valley, and the construction of guard houses for the police in isolated areas. As the staff noted in December 2003, “it is now our opinion that it would be too difficult to obtain CIDA funding at this late point...and subsequently obtain CIDA approval to spend the funds for each project (based on CIDA’s cumbersome project approval process).”¹¹²

CIMIC platoon efforts also had a relationship to local and strategic information operations. There was a lot of Canadian media coverage on the battalion group’s CIMIC activities which was useful on the home front in highlighting Canadian operations in Afghanistan for a Canadian population. Unfortunately, the Canadian contingent lacked an integral psychological operations capability to fully exploit the CIMIC platoon’s good works with the population and the antagonistic forces in and around Kabul. Though they could draw on brigade psychological operations resources, the synergy necessary at the tactical level was lacking. Psychological operations, like CIMIC, were also a fledgling capability for the Canadian Army, with no trade or unit structure to protect and encourage their development. It would take some years to correct this deficiency.

‘Night Work’

Canada’s involvement with special operations forces in complex environments was minimal prior to Afghanistan. The Kabul operations afforded new opportunities to understand this normally concealed aspect of coalition operations. For the most part, Canada deployed a small team of CANSOF operators to Kabul – this was Operation ARTEMIS and as noted earlier, this was not formally part of Operation ATHENA. This CANSOF contingent was generally structured for the close protection of VIPs and their retrieval if necessary. They were not necessarily in Kabul to conduct direct action operations. The ISAF commander did have a small team of German SOF as well. For the most part, SOF remained a national prerogative and not a NATO ISAF one.¹¹³

That said, numerous informal relationships existed in part to reduce the possibility of “blue on blue.” The main problem was the sheer number and variety of special operations forces in and around Kabul. As one observer noted, “literally not a month would go by when we didn’t discover a new key player.”¹¹⁴ In the main, these were American organizations for several agencies, including some that were even competing with each other, and another that was completely entrepreneurial, where an ex-U.S. Special Forces individual portrayed himself and his team as current special forces personnel.¹¹⁵

ISAF HQ took a cautious approach to key-individual capture operations. The concept of “second row support” was in play in that ISAF wanted as much as possible to reinforce the sovereignty of the Afghan Transitional Administration government, so the National Directorate of Security or Kabul police had to take the lead even if targeting information came from ISAF or other national sources. Similarly, if the National Directorate of Security

or Kabul City Police needed ISAF back-up, there had to be a process. In both cases, ISAF was accused by allies (or THE ally) and even the Afghan security forces of “taking too long.” This was designed to “make sure that everything was checked out ahead of time because we didn’t want to get sucked into one war lord using us against another...it had nothing to do with [national caveats].”

Additionally, not all ISAF partners had the capability or the national will to do ‘night work,’ as it was euphemistically called. In those cases, one nation’s resources could be used in another nation’s area of operations. However, in some cases, the forces of a third party might even be observing the same target:

[Kabul Multinational Brigade] was conducting a mission [in the French area] and they were all set to go and we’re all waiting tensely around the telephone and the radios back at ISAF HQ. The battle group commander comes on and in high speed French tells us in no uncertain terms that they have to abort because they’ve found themselves at the start line and sharing that start line with the forces from another agency going after the same target...it was all right when we would bump into American or other forces because of the commonality of language but it would get extraordinarily tense when you have Afghans who are faced with the unexpected.¹¹⁶

In Canada’s case, the Short and Beerenfenger killings highlighted the problem of the artificial boundary in the mountains that delineated ISAF’s area of operations. If Ottawa would not permit Canadian forces to operate on the other side of the line, as it were, and that line could not be moved, then how was Canada going to attenuate terrorist activity in those areas? The informal discussions that took place during the tracking of the Short/Beerenfenger killers between DComd ISAF and British forces led to discussions on the possibility of British SOF being employed on the other side of the line. This activity was supported by Commander in Chief AFNORTH, whose primary concern was operational security, so Afghan entities in Kabul were not in the know. In return, the Canadian ASIC assisted British forces with some targeting aspects in Kabul City.¹¹⁷ This bilateral relationship continued into 2005 until Canada withdrew from Kabul and headed south.

In the short term, the relationship was expanded by November 2003 to include the United States and as a result, it became key in the apprehension of several terrorists. There were an estimated four main targets: two in the British area, and one each in the German and French areas. The Canadian ASIC and elements of ISTAR Company played a significant role in this effort. In December 2003, Mamor Malang, one of the top three HiG commanders in the city, and a man who reported directly to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was nabbed by a Kabul City Police patrol at a vehicle checkpoint, with the British company backing them up. He was taken to the British base, Camp Souter, and then

transferred to Bagram Air Field.¹¹⁸ ‘Night Work’ became an increasingly crucial aspect of the Canadian campaign in Kabul which, over time, became instrumental in completely dislocating the HiG organization for extended periods, particularly during critical events like the loya jirga and the 2004 election.

Task Force Kabul Operations: November 2003

Operation OVERTHROW, the planned clearance of the Jowz Valley, was suspended when a Zettelmeyer armoured earthmover from the Field Squadron struck a mine. Some of the Operation WOLVERINE and Operation GRIZZLY covert patrols in western districts C and E were shifted to maintain continuous observation of the valley. Operation FOXHOUND, the planned surge into PDs 5 and 14, was modified because of manning issues. A series of patrols and observation post operations were planned instead, pending the resources for a surge into the districts to disrupt criminal activity. (See Figure 4-10) 3 RCR involvement with the United Kingdom patrol company led to the exchange of a section of personnel with the Gurkhas in Operation KHUKURI: this was the first of several profitable engagements between the Canadian Army and the Gurkhas in Afghanistan.

The escalation of the terrorist threat in November during the lead-up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga altered the Canadian contingent’s operational pattern. Operation LURKER was a series of random or directed short-term vehicle checkpoints, observation posts, and local surges from Camp Julien into immediately adjacent areas in order to dislocate terrorist movements and observation of the camp or its convoys. One Operation LURKER focus became the King’s Palace, a huge heavily damaged structure across the road from the camp. One patrol discovered two 107mm rockets wired to a car battery and pointed into Camp Julien. Snipers were inserted at night to keep watchful eye and Quebec Company increased foot patrolling two kilometres outside the camp. Five days later, an IED consisting of two 100mm shells was discovered in an area used by the patrols. Three days after that, friendly Kabul City Police from PD 7 arrested two people carrying 35 pounds of explosives on their way from the village of Rish Khvor. Initially, it was believed they were on their way to the King’s Palace, but as it turned out, their target was the Constitutional Loya Jirga. LCol Denne’s concerns increased and he wanted permission to use his surveillance resources to trigger a “second row strike” operation using the Kabul City Police. Operation LURKER continued to turn up interesting aspects of the King’s Palace – one patrol found a tunnel that led to an observation post which could not be seen from any of the Camp Julien observation posts or towers. It was well positioned and recently constructed.¹¹⁹

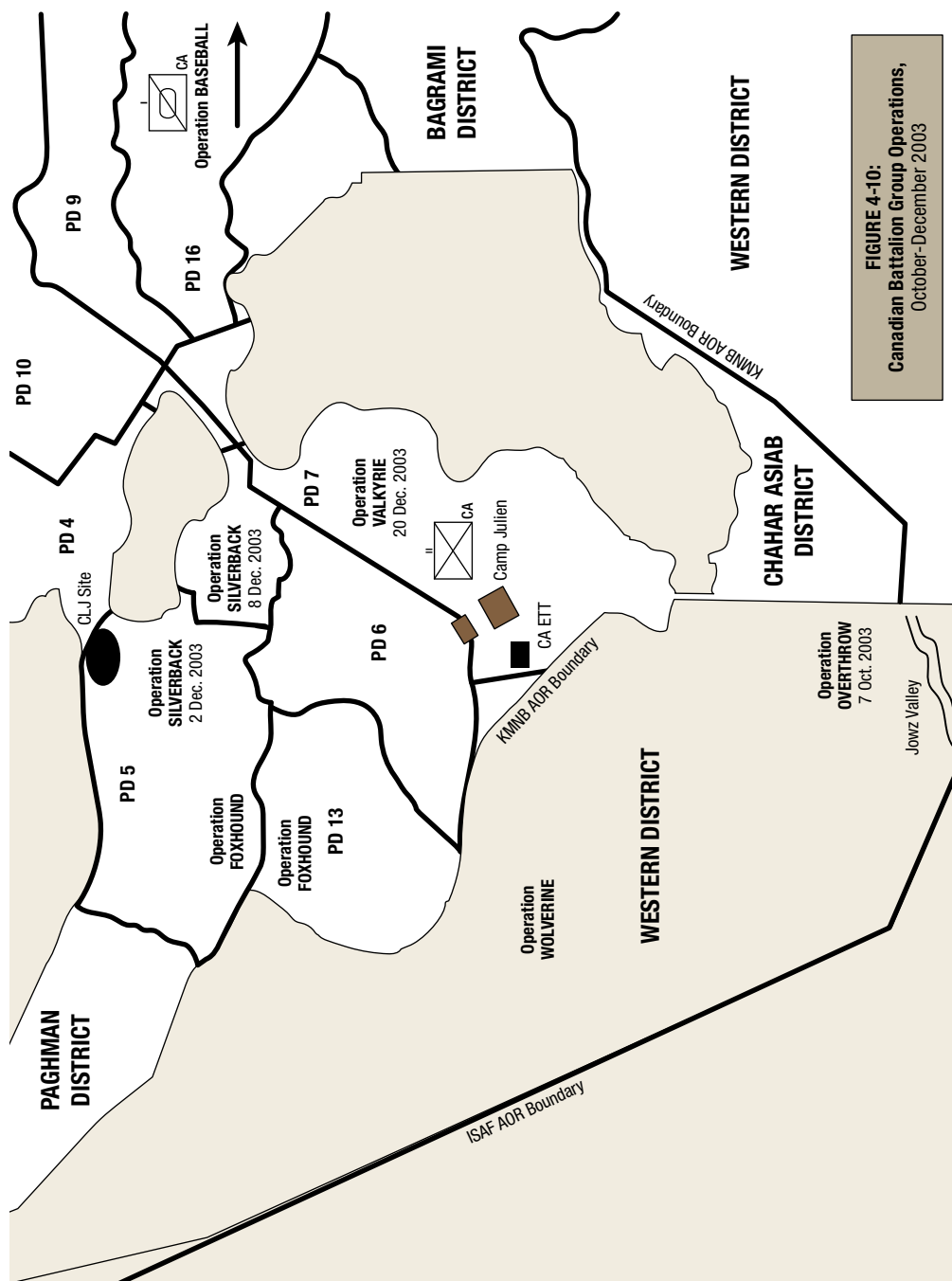


Figure 4-10: Canadian Battalion Group Operations, October-December 2003

Introducing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: The Sperwer TUAV

The decision to acquire the SAGEM Sperwer (“Sparrowhawk”) earlier in May 2003 finally gave the Canadian Army an unmanned aerial surveillance system. Canada lagged behind the other NATO countries in UAV acquisition and integration, so the acquisition of the CU-161 Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle or TUAV as the Sperwer was known in Canadian service was a welcome development. By November 2003, four delta-winged TUAV airframes with their cameras, two ground control stations, the catapult launching system and system maintenance support was finally assembled and operating. Manned by a combination of artillery troops and Air Command navigators, the unit was designated TUAV Troop and assigned to ISTAR Company.

The capability that the TUAV brought to the environment in Kabul was unlike anything the Canadian Army had experienced before. The CU-161’s camera was superb, as was its ability to loiter for hours at a time. 3 RCR was so impressed they asked for a jury-rigged ground feed to their tactical operations centre so they could observe and a dedicated radio link so they could talk to the All Source Intelligence Centre and task the system. Decision-makers now had the ability to observe an operation or an event in real time, not wait for it to be relayed by radio or interpreted through the news media. This had positive and negative effects – it permitted rapid reaction to an event, but it also increased the likelihood of micromanagement of an event with a subsequent loss of perspective on the span of simultaneous events.¹²⁰ This caused some problems. First, having a system like the TUAV and integrating it into the various processes used by the Canadian Army to conduct operations while the Army was in an operational environment meant that there was a steep learning curve beyond just the physical processes of flying and recovering the airframe.¹²¹

By January 2004, all of the airframes were damaged and most needed out-of-theatre repair – one even flew into a mountain as the camera ball was slewed around looking for a landing site. 24 Field Squadron had to clear a minefield so the aircraft could be recovered. There was media criticism and mockery. Then there was inter-service criticism from elements in Air Command who either a) didn’t like UAVs; b) thought the Army should not control them; or c) both.¹²² There was an immense amount of pressure, and most of it landed on ISTAR Company and the TUAV Troop. These crews fought to demonstrate to the detractors that UAVs were a vital element in the Army’s force structure. Their efforts were not in vain and bore fruit over the course of Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan.

Problems in the North – and the South

Instability pulsed throughout Afghanistan while ISAF focused on stabilizing the capital. The international coalitions were trying to keep a lid on problems in the north and the south in the run-up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga. Once again, the long-term effects of what was occurring in late 2003 would resonate over the next decade, particularly for the Canadian Army.

In the north, a long-standing rivalry between Rashid Dostum and Atta Mohammad Noor caused some angst in Mazar-e Sharif when fighting broke out between their respective forces in late September 2003. This rivalry dated back to the 1992-1993 period when Atta formed his own Tajik militia and marched on Mazar-e Sharif where he was defeated by Dostum's forces and it looked like a re-play now that the Taliban were disabled. Karzai intervened, fired Atta, and offered him the post of Minister for Mines and Resources. If Atta were to take the position, he would have to relinquish control over his militia forces. This situation was inadvertently problematic in that Atta was a buffer between Dostum and Fahim Khan on a number of levels, but it made DDR potentially easier, especially when Dostum's and Atta's forces were to be merged into one corps before the process was initiated. However, this process would take some time – and even U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld eventually became personally involved in December 2003 to keep the Dostum-Atta rivalry under control.¹²³

As for Fahim Khan and the Panjshir Tajiks, they were resisting DDR and the cantonment of their forces north of Kabul, as they would obviously lose their ability to coerce the Afghan Transitional Administration in Kabul. Though they went along with heavy weapons cantonment in Kabul, they continued to resist DDR and cantonment up in the Panjshir Valley well into 2004. Over in Herat, in western Afghanistan, power broker Ismael Khan saw with some alarm what DDR was doing to his Uzbek and Tajik rivals, and was concerned about the idea of having an Afghan border police and customs service that didn't report to (and kick back to) him. The situation in Herat would also simmer into 2004 and blow up later that summer.¹²⁴

There were similar problems relating to DDR in Paktia province, but the United States-led coalition was in the driver's seat in that region so it took the lead. Once again, rivalries in the Khost region related to those encountered by Operation APOLLO forces operating there in 2002 made it another potential problem area.

It was in Afghanistan's south that there were serious concerns that resonated in Kabul. There was a pattern of Taliban attacks against aid workers and moderate leaders in Kandahar and throughout the south in September 2003, which noticeably slowed the pace of development and in turn produced a "sense of alienation and perhaps even fear amongst the moderate Pashtuns." Prophetically, MGen Leslie noted in a report back to Canada:

In the pantheon of needs, security comes first. Once a relative degree of security is achieved, reconstruction and social development can follow. I suppose the bottom line is that the status quo will not win the fight for a better Afghanistan. Either NATO/ISAF expands in the short term, with the appropriate resources to make a positive difference, or the West might find itself committing a lot of resources in a couple of years to stabilize and pacify Afghanistan the hard way.¹²⁵

The Red Cross then suspended operations in the south in October 2003, which produced a spillover effect on “those whom are charged with doing the census, voter registration and the establishment of the electoral mechanisms”¹²⁶ needed for the 2004 elections as well as the 2003 loya jirga. Concerns increased, particularly in the run-up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga. On 11 November, a vehicle-borne IED detonated outside the UN-sponsored election office in Kandahar that was preparing the way for delegate election. Even though there were no casualties, this was interpreted by ISAF as a “direct attack against the Loya Jirga electoral process.”¹²⁷

UN Special Representative Brahimi met with DComd ISAF on 14 November 2003 prior to an emergency security meeting with the principle international commanders. Brahimi was “quite frustrated” and was “determined to get ISAF and NATO to expand across the country.” Brahimi wanted ISAF escorts for convoys on the Kabul/Kandahar/Herat ring road and possibly a company for security in Kandahar to protect the UN. Leslie told him that there “is no advantage in ISAF rushing to failure by biting off more than we can chew.”¹²⁸ That said, Brahimi kept UNAMA in Kandahar but with a reduced footprint.

The security meeting included Deputy Minister of Defence Wardak Lt Gen Hilal from the Afghan Army; Minister for Tribal Affairs Arif Noorzai; the new Commander CJTF-180, Lt Gen David Barno; Brahimi; and MGen Leslie. Brahimi reiterated that the attack was anti-loya jirga, and that he would recommend to the UN Secretary General that the UN expand ISAF’s mandate. The participants explored various security options – the Western military representatives favoured an Afghan response, with Wardak suggesting that AMF in the south with an American command structure was another option.

This was a particularly interesting idea. UNAMA, as it turned out, had been in talks with the American commanders in Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan over the concept of a “Regional Development Zone” or RDZ earlier in 2003. Kandahar was scheduled to be the pilot stabilization project of an RDZ, which would incorporate the UN, the American PRT, and Afghan security forces from the emergent Afghan National Army and “DDR’d” militia. Using the AMF with American advisors might jump-start the RDZ process in Kandahar, which in turn could have significant short-term positive effects (the RDZ concept will be revisited in chapters dealing with the 2004–2006 period.)¹²⁹

In any event, Ottawa was warned that “UNAMA will continue to push for a higher physical presence of ISAF units outside Kabul, particularly with respect to Kandahar, due to the interplay between security challenges, election processes, and a recent UNAMA/ Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan interest to render the city the first pilot project of a regional development model.”¹³⁰

In a follow-on meeting with Hamid Karzai, and the same principles a week later, UNAMA representatives noted that the security situation was worse, that the enemy had changed his attack patterns, and had also increased his propaganda fight. Karzai was incensed and “severely criticized UNAMA for the negative messages it is sending regarding the security situation in Afghanistan. He bluntly stated that he is not concerned about the Taliban and does not consider them a threat to anything in Afghanistan. He repeated that Afghanistan’s two main threats are incompetence and corruption in the Afghanistan Transitional Administration and the threat from across the border.”¹³¹

This was astounding to the Canadians, to say the least. Karzai differentiated the Taliban in Afghanistan from the variety of its allied insurgent organizations nestled in the valleys of western Pakistan. This was contrary to the predominant view of a much larger problem with even greater implications:

The Taliban et al have been targeting local Afghans with some success...eliminating a variety of low and middle-level municipal leaders who are pro-ATA/pro-reform. The attacks have taken place south of the ISAF AO [area of operation], with raiders lunging across the Pakistan border, killing, then fleeing back to safety. This is infuriating the ATA and its local supporters whom are made to look even more powerless than they are...There is little doubt that CJTF-180 has recognized that some serious mucking out is long overdue in this part of the world. I speculate that perhaps the Taliban and or/AQ [Al Qaeda] (keeping in mind that the Taliban and AQ are not friends, they merely share a common enemy) have taken up the practice of hiring these local Pashtun bandits as hit teams, or to escort AQ elements...But if the US goes into Pakistan to muck out these brigands the ever-simmering resentment against the President [Musharraf] for his recent pro-US/Western stance could boil over and might result in Islamic fundamentalists seizing control over Pakistan and their nuclear weapons...What a complicated dynamic we find ourselves in. It is both appalling and fascinating...[Canada’s] impact here is subtle but far more important than those living in blissful ignorance might realize.¹³²

The Constitutional Loya Jirga: December 2003

The events of December 2003 were momentous in the history of Afghanistan. For the first time ever, the Afghan people were involved in selecting the type of government they wanted and the mechanisms by which they would be governed. This was a real opportunity after nearly 25 years of totalitarian repression and unremitting violence to start afresh with international community support. That support could not be made available without a government to deal with. However, the December 2003 meetings were a necessary precursor to the flow of international aid, which was crucial to the reconstruction of the country.

The preliminary event was the Emergency Loya Jirga of 2002 mandated by the Bonn Agreement. The Afghan Interim Administration's task was to work with the UN to establish the rules that would be used to create the new constitution. An emergency loya jirga, made up of representatives from throughout Afghanistan, would discuss and endorse these rules. The follow-on Afghan Transitional Administration would then create a Constitutional Commission, draft a constitution, and present it to a Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003 for approval. The selection of delegates from around the country for this loya jirga was in itself an involved process designed to ensure broad representation.

This was a public and fragile process, subject to a variety of influences from both inside and outside Afghanistan. Western critics, mostly academics and lawyers, had their ideas of how the Afghans should be governed. They attacked the process as flawed because it did not incorporate their concepts of human rights.¹³³ Fundamentalist Islamic opponents to stability in Afghanistan shrilly claimed this was an "American" constitution being imposed on the Afghans by the victors and it was un-Islamic because it was not fundamentalist enough for them.¹³⁴ Every ethnic, political, and religious group in the country worried about potential loss of power and prestige in any new order that might emerge from the process. The Pashtun majority was concerned about the potential challenge to their cultural traditions by modernity, while the other groups were worried that too much power would be centralized under the Pashtuns. It became a question of who was prepared to use violence to influence the process and who was not.

At the same time, the insurgency coalesced when opponents realized how important the Constitutional Loya Jirga was and how much it threatened their objectives. By December 2003, the Taliban, HiG, Al Qaeda, and their associates formally established a new movement, the Jawahar al-Islam, or "The Shining of Islam." Its stated purpose was to combat the emergent Afghan state, which they declared to be a Western crusader construct. These groups would ultimately step up operations to interfere with the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

Then there were the Afghan power brokers. It was not clear if all, some or none of them would be co-opted by the Constitutional Loya Jirga process. Certainly, DDR and heavy weapons cantonment, coupled with the demonstrative resolve of ISAF's forces during the

unpleasantness back in September and the increased involvement in Afghan Army training played a role in convincing at least some of them to become involved in establishing a new state. It was equally probable that the monetary incentives and prestige dangled by the international community played a significant role as well. That said, there were always outliers who could throw the whole event off the rails. Not all weapons had been cantoned, and not all of the AMF units had been DDR'd, especially the ones belonging to the Panjshir Tajiks and Dostum in Mazar-e Sharif.

The UN decided that the university campus would be the site of the meetings – and that was in the Canadian area of operations. Representatives from throughout Afghanistan, about 500, would converge on Kabul, where they had to be housed, fed, and protected from intimidation. Then delegates for the various working groups would be elected from these representatives. Next, the working groups would assess each part of the draft constitution. When a final version was accepted, there would be a vote. This process would take several weeks, possibly longer than a month. A lot could go wrong in a month in Kabul.

Security coordination for the Constitutional Loya Jirga fell on the backs of MGen Leslie, BGen Devlin, LCol Denne, and the units under their command. At issue was the need to avoid the outward impression that ISAF was running the show. This was critical in that the constitutional process was already under attack as something imposed by the West. Everything possible had to be done to demonstrate to the world that Afghans were in the forefront of security for an Afghan process.

This took several forms. First, the Canadian ETT did everything it could to get 1st Kandak prepared for the security operations; they were going to be the predominant security force present at the loya jirga site. Second, the police training activities undertaken by 3 RCR were also crucial. Third, BGen Devlin convinced the Afghan National Army and the Kabul City Police to cooperate in the weeks running up to the loya jirga. A joint coordination centre was established, which included ISAF, the Afghan National Army, Kabul City Police, and the National Directorate of Security. Contingency planning and rehearsals were done by the Afghan agencies, but with Canadians keeping a close eye on the proceedings. Fourth, BGen Devlin and his staff, working with Afghan staffs, established several rings of security: the inner, outer, and long-range cordons. UNAMA, with its contractor security, would be discreetly present inside the loya jirga site, just in case. The site itself was the responsibility of 1st Kandak and the police, with Canadian combat engineers from 24 Field Squadron and their EOD/IED capability to sweep the site. Outside of the site were KMNB, the National Directorate of Security, and the balance of the Afghan National Army. ISTAR Company had Coyotes on all of the high features and UAVs orbiting above western Kabul. A Norwegian infantry company and Charles Company with its LAV IIIs constituted the Immediate

Reaction Force; they also had 24 Field Squadron EOD/IEDD support.¹³⁵ There was also the United Kingdom's "Mobile Drug Detection Team" who worked with the Kabul police during this time.

ISAF information operations also played an important role. The planners anticipated that the various insurgent groups would generate incidents, successful or not, to demonstrate that the Afghan Transitional Administration did not control the city and therefore could not protect the Constitutional Loya Jirga and thus the future of Afghanistan. The counter-message, used pre-emptively, was "We can bring 500 various determined and antagonistic personalities together under one tent and they can sit next to each other, perhaps beside an old foe, break bread and debate on the greater good. What can YOU insurgents do except kill and maim?" The message to the power brokers was, "No weapons allowed. No coercion allowed. You too can talk with your former opponents for the greater good of Afghanistan under the tent and people will listen to your concerns."¹³⁶

The Canadians assessed that there was some form of alliance between Sayyaf and the other fundamentalists to facilitate Taliban and Al Qaeda operations in the south of the country designed to shape the Constitutional Loya Jirga representative makeup through selective assassination long before the representatives even arrived in Kabul. Their objectives were to ensure that the constitution integrated Sharia and other Islamist principles. The greatest threat assessed, however, was Rabbani, Fahim Khan, Ismael Khan, Dostum, and Khalili, men who had "grown rich and very powerful under the current rules of the game...compounded by the lucrative drug trade and land grabbing schemes they have refined into an art form." The Constitutional Loya Jirga was a potential threat to their relative power. Iran and particularly Pakistan were considered potential threats as well, but they would probably act through intermediaries and proxies.¹³⁷

Some threats were pre-empted in the run-up to the loya jirga. There were concerns in the international community that several second-tier Afghan military leaders in Kabul associated with the power brokers, men who received no media attention but who nevertheless wielded the ability to cause problems, might in fact do so before they lost their heavy weapons during the cantonment process. One was sent out of the country by President Karzai and another was sent to western Afghanistan to command a corps. Another was killed in a firefight during a narcotics interdiction operation launched by a Canadian ally, and a fourth was killed during a shoot-out at a road side checkpoint by another Canadian ally. The two deaths were coincidental, but "a variety of dark motives were ascribed to their deaths or postings" which was useful in the information operations realm. The message got out to the second tier AMF commanders that they were no longer below the radar and they should watch their step. Others higher up took note as well.¹³⁸

3 RCR Battalion Group's plan for loya jirga security was Operation SILVERBACK, which covered a number of activities. LCol Denne surged November Company into PD 5 on 2 December 2003 to disrupt and dislocate the Sayyaf organization, while Charles Company visited the loya jirga site for a recce. There were ongoing problems with Sayyaf's bodyguards throughout this period. On numerous occasions, these individuals threatened Canadian soldiers, going so far as to tell one patrol commander that "When we have the power we will do to you like we did to the Russians and make you leave." LCol Denne stepped up the vehicle checkpoints and vowed he wasn't going to put up with any BS from Sayyaf.¹³⁹ Operation SILVERBACK continued with a company-level surge into PD 3 on 8 December. Then November Company went into both PD 3 and PD 5 and maintained an enhanced presence. The pressure on Sayyaf was on and the message was clear.

On 15 December, ISAF got several threat warnings of an impending rocket attack on the city. 3 RCR increased patrols in Chahar Asiab in response. Then November Company received human intelligence that three villages in the western area contained armed men. That night, a German patrol rumbled a rocket launch party and engaged six insurgents. The following morning several rockets hit downtown Kabul, but none exploded.¹⁴⁰ The Constitutional Loya Jirga started off with a bang.

The next day, one of the ARTHUR radars picked up a mortar track. There were two explosions – one near the parking site and another near the Ministry of Education. Then, out of the blue (or perhaps not), a demolition crew arrived at the refugee camp in PD 7, escorted by a platoon of police. The crowd confronted the crew and a Canadian patrol convinced the police not to escalate the situation. Someone was trying to take advantage of the focus on the loya jirga to seize land – or was someone trying to distract ISAF from loya jirga security? It was not clear. ISTAR Company increased its surveillance resources and MSTAR radars were deployed while F Battery fired illumination rounds randomly throughout the night. LUNA and TUAV sorties increased in the Canadian area of operations.¹⁴¹

Indications suggested that a militia commander who was resistant to DDR and connected to Sayyaf might pull something, so BGen Devlin 'dropped by for tea' one day, which was message enough. Still the threat warnings came in. Now word came through PD 7 police contacts that Camp Julien was the next target for a rocket attack along with the loya jirga site.

On 20 December 2003, 3 RCR launched Operation VALKYRIE designed in part to deter and pre-empt insurgent use of traditional rocket launch areas south and west of Camp Julien. VALKYRIE involved platoon- and company-sized night surges into these areas.¹⁴² On 28 December, two suicide attacks were made against National Directorate of Security personnel, killing six of its members. One of these men was the leader of the counterterrorism unit.¹⁴³

As the *loya jirga* sessions progressed, it became increasingly evident that this was an Afghan process – not a Western process, not an international community process, and not a UN process. These last three groupings of nations facilitated the event, created the conditions that permitted it to take place in a relatively coercion-free environment, and hoped for the best. There are no indications that there was any substantial outside interference or direct manipulation by the principle coalition nations, despite what the critics asserted.¹⁴⁴

Of the issues at stake, some had long-term effects on Afghanistan during the Canadian Army's tenure in that country. The first was the problem of keeping the Pashtuns involved in the process. In a very general sense, the Taliban were seen to be a Pashtun movement supported by the majority of Pashtuns and Pakistan, while the Northern Alliance, despite their inter-factional problems, saw themselves as victors in the civil war and thus the spoils were rightfully theirs. This was not fully accurate – there were numerous anti-Taliban Pashtun tribes and as many Northern Alliance commanders who would change sides if enough money was on the table. The reality was that there was a sense of growing Pashtun alienation that had to be staved off at the Constitutional *Loya Jirga* if the Afghan Transitional Administration was to extend its influence in the south. That meant that the future constitution had to have the right power-sharing balance not only in numbers but also in mechanisms. Moreover, that was where the friction in the *loya jirga* lay: how much power should a Pashtun president have over the other 'victorious' ethnic groups? The process and its results were imperfect, but they were probably as perfect as they could get given the circumstances extant in December 2003.

As the Canadian soldiers and their Afghan counterparts continued to patrol and kept watch in the cold Kabul hills and alleyways throughout late December, the Afghan people and their leaders debated their future. On the night of 31 December 2003, Dr. Sibghatullah Mojadedi announced that most of the discrepancies in the reconciled constitution text had been solved and that a negotiating group had been formed to sort out what remained.

ENDNOTES

1. Roy Gutman, *How We Missed the Story: Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, and the Hijacking of Afghanistan* (Washington DC: US Institute For Peace, 2008), Ch. 2 and 3.
2. Human Rights Watch, *Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity* (Human Rights Watch, 2005).
3. Richard Miniter, *Mastermind: The Many Faces of the 9/11 Architect, Khalid Shaikh Mohammad* (New York: Sentinel Books, 2011), Ch. 3.
4. See Human Rights Watch, *Blood-Stained Hands*.
5. Karzai's Mujahideen lineage was to the royalist faction in the 1980s, not the fundamentalists, and he was Deputy Foreign Minister in 1992. See Berntsen, *Jawbreaker*, p. 81.
6. Sean M. Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force: The Origins of a Stabilization Force," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol 4 No.2.
7. Interview with LCol Dyrald Cross (Kandahar, 13 August 2008).
8. Briefing to the author by MGen Peter Devlin, "Task Force Kabul Roto 0 (Operation ATHENA)" (Ottawa, 13 June 2009).
9. Initially the Arthur radars on their BV tracked chassis were part of ISTAR Company but were sent over to the guns after a month of operation.
10. Interview with Major Dyrald Cross (Kandahar, 13 August 2008).
11. Briefing to the author by MGen Peter Devlin (Ottawa, 13 June 2009). Op ARTEMIS and its relationship with the Canadian contingent was contentious in that the Canadian commanders in Kabul believed that the SOF, with its separate reporting chain, was being used by the DCDS to spy on them like commissars.
12. This would only change with the creation of Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command in 2005-2006. Then CEFCOM started to micromanage operations from Ottawa instead of the DCDS. At least CEFCOM was two steps removed from the civilian bureaucracy instead of one....
13. In November 2003, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) was established as the U.S.-led, coalition headquarters for Afghanistan. CJTF-180 was restructured as a subordinate organization of CFC-A. CFC-A reported in turn to CENTCOM. Under CJTF-180 and later CFC-A, the corps-level overall headquarters, a division-level headquarters supervising fighting brigades was maintained in Afghanistan.
14. DCDS, COS J3, "Memorandum of Understanding CINCNORTH and COMUSCENTCOM Concerning ISAF under NATO Leadership in Afghanistan" (22 August 2003).
15. Message, Warning Order Op ATHENA Roto One (29 August 2003).
16. Briefing to the author by MGen Peter Devlin (Ottawa, 13 June 2009).
17. Ibid.
18. "KMNB Campaign Plan," Leslie Papers.
19. Interview with LGen Andrew Leslie (Ottawa, 14 March 2007); Briefing to the author by MGen Peter Devlin (Ottawa, 13 June 2009).
20. Letter Leslie to Labbé (29 October 2003).
21. CF Fact Sheet, "Op ACCIUS."

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22. This section was based on after-action material provided to the author by BGen Chris Thurrott and from the author's observations in-theatre.
23. Ibid.
24. Briefing, "Op ATHENA 3 RCR Bn Gp Army Lessons Learned Centre/Peace Support Training Centre, 1 December 2003"; Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004."
25. Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004."
26. Ibid.
27. Discussions with LGen Andrew Leslie; Interview with BGen Jocelyn Lacroix (Ottawa, 15 March 2010).
28. CA JTFSWA NCE J2 Daily Int SITREP (11 August 2003).
29. TFK Op ATHENA NCE SITREP (31 August 2003); TFK Op ATHENA NCE SITREP (27 August 2003).
30. Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004."
31. TFK Op ATHENA NCE SITREP (5 September 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (6 September 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (7 September 2003); TFK Op ATHENA NCE SITREP (10 September 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (11 September 2003); Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004"; HQ KMNB SITREP (11 September 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (13 September 2003).
32. HQ KMNB SITREP (6 September 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (7 September 2003).
33. Cross interview; HQ KMNB SITREP (5 September 2003).
34. Cross interview; HQ KMNB SITREP (9 September 2003); ISAF HQ SITREP (11 September 2003).
35. TFK Op ATHENA NCE SITREP (11 September 2003); Message Comd NCE to NDCC (11 September 2003). The ARTHUR radars were leased and there were concerns in Ottawa that too much money would be spent on maintenance if they were operating all of the time. Therefore they were not. Comd TFK SITREP Number 2, Week of 11 to 17 August 2003 (17 August 2003).
36. Trembley to DL, "Arthur Counter-Battery Radar" (23 February 2004).
37. Leslie interview; Comd TFK SITREP Number 6, Week of 8 to 14 September 2003 (15 September 2003); Comd TFK SITREP Number 7, Week of 15 to 21 September 2003 (22 September 2003).
38. Anthony Shaffer, *Operation DARK HEART* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2010), p. 81.
39. Comd TFK SITREP Number 7, Week of 15 to 21 September 2003 (22 September 2003).
40. Leslie interview.
41. Clearly some planner in KMNB HQ loved movies that dealt with coup themes. POWER PLAY was a 1978 film about a coup d'état in a third world country. The Canadian Army provided the Centurion tanks. Op VALKYRIE was another CONPLAN in Kabul.
42. Comd TFK SITREP Number 7, Week of 15 to 21 September 2003 (22 September 2003).
43. Cross interview.
44. Devlin interview.
45. HQ KMNB G3 Plans "Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 013-Increased Force Protection Measures for Key Point" (L September 2003).
46. Ibid.

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47. Ibid.
48. Comd TFK SITREP Number 7, Week of 15 to 21 September 2003 (22 September 2003).
49. Lt Col Shaffer's assertion in *Operation DARK HEART* that ISAF forces did not constitute "combat power" and that the only combat power resided with CJTF-180 in Bagram (p. 82) is, clearly, incorrect.
50. Devlin interview.
51. HQ KMN B G3 Plans "Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 013-Increased Force Protection Measures for Key Point" (L September 2003).
52. Leslie interview.
53. KMN B HQ SITREP (18 September 2003).
54. Comd TFK SITREP Number 1, Week of 3 to 12 August 2003 (10 August 2003). Barbara Stapleton, who worked with NGOs and the EU, contends that the Japanese would not release monies until Ministry of Defence reform was implemented. See "Disarming the Militias: DDR and DIAG and the Implications for Peace Building," in Markus Hakansson (ed), *Peacebuilding in Afghanistan*, at <http://www.sak.se>.
55. Comd TFK SITREP Number 2, Week of 11 to 17 August 2003 (17 August 2003).
56. Briefing Note, "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Integration (DDR) and Heavy Weapons Cantonment (HWC) in Kabul" (18 January 2004).
57. Leslie interview.
58. As detailed in Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
59. Ibid.
60. Comd TFK SITREP Number 3, Week of 18 to 24 August 2003 (24 August 2003).
61. Graham interview; HQ ISAF SITREP (3 December 2003).
62. Memorandum Maclean to Maddison and Henault (24 October 2003).
63. HQ ISAF SITREP (11 September 2003); Bradley Graham *By His Own Rules: The Ambitions, Successes, and Ultimate Failures of Donald Rumsfeld* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2009), p. 382.
64. Based on author's data collected from ISAF EOD in December 2004.
65. IEDs achieved saliency in the North American media and popular commentary in 2004, so much so that some analysts were concerned about Iraqi IED techniques 'migrating' to Afghanistan. They need not have worried. Note that sophisticated IEDs were in use in Afghanistan long before the United States-led coalition occupied Iraq by mid-2003 and were subjected to sustained insurgent attack later that year.
66. HQ KMN B SITREP (5 September 2003); HQ KMN B SITREP (6 September 2003); HQ ISAF SITREP (9 September 2003); HQ ISAF SITREP (23 September 2003); HQ ISAF SITREP (30 September 2003). Dangar was also involved in the 1992–1993 unpleasantness in Kabul and was considered to be a war criminal by human rights organizations. See *Blood-Stained Hands*, p. 52.
67. HQ KMN B SITREP (7 October 2003).
68. Comd TFK SITREP Number 4, Week of 25 to 31 August 2003 (31 August 2003).
69. David C. Isby, "Trojan Horse or Genuine Schism? The Hizb-i-Islami Split," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 2 Issue 11 (2 June 2004).
70. HQ ISAF SITREP (29 September 2003).

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71. Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004."
72. Memorandum Wadsworth to DCDS, "Briefing Note: Mine Strike 02 October 2003" (5 October 2003).
73. Leslie interview. Leslie papers, Letter Leslie to DCDS, "Jowz Valley Mine-Strike Board of Inquiry-Final Report."
74. TFK NCE SITREP (6 October 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (29 October 2003).
75. This was called Op CAROUSEL.
76. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 9 and 10, Weeks of 29 September to 12 October 2003 (13 October 2003).
77. HQ KMNB SITREP (7 October 2003).
78. HQ KMNB SITREP (14 October 2003).
79. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 13, 14, and 15, Weeks of 27 October to 16 November 2003 (17 November 2003).
80. HQ KMNB SITREP (4 October 2003).
81. HQ KMNB SITREP (14 October 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (15 October 2003).
82. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 13, 14, and 15, Weeks of 27 October to 16 November 2003 (17 November 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (14 November 2003).
83. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 13, 14, and 15, Weeks of 27 October to 16 November 2003 (17 November 2003).
84. HQ ISAF SITREP (16 September 2003).
85. HQ ISAF SITREP (11 September 2003).
86. HQ ISAF SITREP (2 October 2003).
87. HQ ISAF SITREP (7 October 2003); HQ ISAF SITREP (13 October 2003).
88. Leslie interview.
89. HQ ISAF SITREP (27 October 2003).
90. HQ ISAF SITREP (16 December 2003).
91. Email Hitesman to DL, "Afghan National Army Military Training" (25 August 2003).
92. Comd TFK SITREP Number 4, Week of 25 to 31 August 2003 (31 August 2003).
93. Comd TFK SITREP Number 5, Week of 1 to 7 September 2003 (8 August 2003); Email thread M.G. Rompre to D NATO Pol, "Afghan National Army Military Training" (25 August 2003).
94. Memorandum from Leslie, "Embedded Training Team Coordination Meeting" (20 September 2003).
95. Email Comd NCE to DL, "Op PHOENIX Visit" (27 August 2003).
96. COS J3 to DCDS, "Comd TFK Support to ANA Training" (3 October 2003); Leslie to DL, "Commander TFK Guidance-Canadian Embedded Training Team" (12 October 2003).
97. Interview with Capt Mike Chagnon (Petawawa, 10 March 2010). See also Mike Chagnon, "CF Embedded Training Team Lessons Learned," *Canadian Army Journal* (Fall/Winter 2004), pp. 135-146.
98. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 9 and 10, Weeks of 29 September to 12 October 2003 (13 October 2003).
99. Briefing, "Op ATHENA Roto 0 3 RCR Bn Gp briefing to LCol J.B.S. Roy 10 February 2004."
100. HQ ISAF SITREP (16 September 2003).
101. TFK NCE SITREP (19 September 2003).

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102. Briefing, "Op ATHENA 3 RCR Bn Gp Army Lessons Learned Peace Support Training Centre 1 December 2003."
103. Telephone interview with the Minister of Defence Bill Graham (5 March 2010).
104. COS J3 and DCDS, "CIMIC and CIDA" (11 December 2003).
105. Comd TFK SITREP Number 4, Week of 25 to 31 August 2003 (31 August 2003).
106. Comd TFK SITREP Number 5, Week of 1 to 7 September 2003 (8 September 2003).
107. COS J3 to DCDS, "Op ATHENA 3 RCR BG CIMIC Projects List" (7 October 2003).
108. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 9 and 10, Weeks of 29 September to 12 October 2003 (13 October 2003).
109. Comd TFK SITREP Number 11 and 12, Weeks of 13 October to 26 October 2003 (27 October 2003).
110. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 13, 14, and 15, Weeks of 27 October to 16 November 2003 (17 November 2003).
111. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 16 and 17, Weeks of 17 November to 15 December 2003 (4 January 2004).
112. COS J3 and DCDS, "CIMIC and CIDA" (11 December 2003).
113. Leslie interview; Devlin interview.
114. Leslie interview.
115. This was the Jack Idema case.
116. Leslie interview.
117. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 16 and 17, Weeks of 17 November to 15 December 2003 (4 January 2004).
118. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 16 and 17, Weeks of 17 November to 15 December 2003 (4 January 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (3 December 2003).
119. TFK NCE SITREPS (20 November 2003, 25 November 2003, 28 November 2003, 29 November 2003, 8 December 2003).
120. This problem was first noted during the Oka Crisis when an RCMP helicopter equipped with a Wescam camera system fed imagery in real time to FMC HQ. The FMC commander in turn used this new capability to tell a company commander over a cell phone that he didn't like how one of his platoons was deployed, thus jumping down four levels of the chain of command on a trivial issue.
121. Cross interview. See also Chris W. Johnson, "Act in Haste, Repent at Leisure: An Overview of Operational Incidents involving UAV's in Afghanistan."
122. This faction did not want to deploy Aurora patrol aircraft with their camera systems to Afghanistan either and apparently were incapable of conceiving of missions that didn't involve hunting Soviet submarines that weren't there anymore. Note that the Americans and British forces deployed maritime patrol aircraft as ISTAR platforms in Afghanistan, in addition to a variety of UAVs.
123. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 9 and 10, Weeks of 29 September to 12 October 2003 (13 October 2003); HQ ISAF SITREP (6 December 2003).
124. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 9 and 10, Weeks of 29 September to 12 October 2003 (13 October 2003); Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
125. Comd TFK SITREP Number 8, Week of 22 to 28 September 2003 (30 September 2003).
126. Comd TFK SITREP Number 11 and 12, Weeks of 13 October to 26 October 2003 (27 October 2003).
127. HQ ISAF SITREP (11 November 2003).

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128. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 13, 14, and 15, Weeks of 27 October to 16 November 2003 (17 November 2003).
129. HQ ISAF SITREP (14 November 2003).
130. Ibid.
131. HQ ISAF SITREP (26 November 2003).
132. Comd TFK SITREP Number 3, Week of 18 to 24 August 2003 (24 August 2003).
133. Cornelia Schneider, "Striking a Balance in Post-Conflict Constitution-Making: Lessons from Afghanistan for the International Community" *Peace, Conflict and Development*, Vol. 7 (July 2005), pp. 174-215.
134. The circular logic here is intentional.
135. Devlin interview.
136. Leslie interview.
137. Comd TFK SITREP Numbers 16 and 17, Weeks of 17 November to 15 December 2003 (4 January 2004).
138. Leslie interview.
139. TFK NCE SITREP (4 December 2003); H KMNB SITREP (2 December 2003).
140. HQ KMNB SITREP (16 December 2003).
141. HQ KMNB SITREP (17 December 2003).
142. HQ KMNB SITREP (18 December 2003); HQ KMNB SITREP (19 December 2003).
143. Based on author's data collected from ISAF EOD in December 2004.
144. Specifically, Schneider in "Striking a Balance in Post-Conflict Constitution-Making: Lessons from Afghanistan for the International Community," who asserts that there was "no deployment of international military personnel to protect the process and no special Afghan police or army units [that had] been trained." Clearly this is inaccurate.

DECREASINGLY CALM BUT COMPARATIVELY STABLE:

OPERATION ATHENA IN KABUL, JANUARY-AUGUST 2004

The Canadian Army's role in ISAF Kabul operations in 2004 built on the solid foundations established in the last half of 2003. For the most part, the critical issues relating to the immediate survival of the Afghan Transitional Administration followed by the drive to attain political consensus amongst the power brokers and avoid civil war were addressed by Operation ATHENA Roto 0 – and not without cost. Roto 1 continued to implement and monitor the heavy weapons cantonment projects and became engaged in the voter registration and elections security operations so critical to ensuring that the Constitutional Loya Jirga would remain successful over the long term. Roto 2 and 3, operating in a “residual capacity,” continued to provide highly capable resources for KMNB security operations in order to make the capital a safer place. All the while, the Canadian ETT made every effort to improve the capacity of the Afghan Army. At the same time, there were serious problems in the international community's ability to coordinate a myriad of efforts to assist the Afghan people in the face of growing threats. Once again, the Canadian Army's central position in many of the processes paid off in attempts to harmonize coalition strategy.

The Conclusion of the Constitutional Loya Jirga

On the night of 31 December 2003, Dr. Mojadedi announced that there was tentative agreement among the parties. To ensure that entities did not generate violence, 3 RCR mounted several simultaneous Operation VALKYRIE surges into western Kabul and quintupled the number of Operation LURKER patrols. The drama at the loya jirga continued the next day, with the Rabbani and Sayyaf factions threatening to boycott a vote on the constitution so that they could demonstrate strength on ethnic issues related to Pashtun representation and presidential power. 3 RCR and ISTAR Company then mounted Operation MAVERICK, a company-level surge into PD 14 which was, not coincidentally, Sayyaf territory. MAVERICK was ostensibly designed to deter criminal activity but what constituted criminal activity could, of course, be broadly defined.¹

With 48% of the delegates boycotting the vote, the Constitutional Loya Jirga adjourned until 3 January 2004. The sticking point was the number of vice-presidents and whether or not Afghans of dual nationality could become ministers. This last problem reflected a schism that emerged after the collapse of the Taliban between Afghans that left the country either during the Soviet period or the Taliban period and then returned in 2002, and those that stayed and fought. Those that had left were viewed with some disdain. In some cases, there was a difference in the educational level of each group. Western-educated Afghans that returned ran into sometimes illiterate ex-Mujahideen that were not afraid to use violence to achieve objectives. However, if international investment in the reconstruction process was going to take place, a bureaucracy was needed. On another level, this boycott was directed against specific personalities in the Afghan Transitional Administration who were clearly in the way of individual agendas clothed in ethnic robes.

Lakhdar Brahimi was brought in to help break up the logjam. Francesc Vendrell from the European Union joined him and worked with Mojadedi to find a solution. The loya jirga lurched forward once again and on 3 January Mojadedi announced that there was agreement on the constitution between all parties. The Constitutional Loya Jirga wound down over the next four days as delegates lingered at the site. Operation SILVERBACK also wound down and 3 RCR and ISTAR Company shifted their resources elsewhere.

Afghanistan now had a constitution, and for the first time since 1974, the population's representatives, be they political, ethnic, or religious, had the basis for a state that was something other than scientific socialism or Islamic fundamentalism. Contrary to the critics, this process was an Afghan process and every effort had been made to take into account all sources of power and influence in the country. The UN facilitated the process and a combination of Afghan and coalition forces protected it. Attempts to intimidate delegates, in the broadest sense, were thwarted by the security effort in Kabul. Most importantly, the process and its protective measures were seen to be an Afghan process – and communicated as such through the media.

The Constitutional Loya Jirga was a legitimate process with a legitimate result, endorsed by the international community. To ensure that the level of legitimacy was retained, however, two things had to happen. First, the Afghan Transitional Administration had to be replaced with an elected government at the national and provincial levels. Second, the government had to have a functioning bureaucracy in order to ensure that the resources needed for reconstruction could be obtained from the international community and distributed to where they were needed. And that was the back story for the next three years of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. How exactly does a technologically advanced nation and its allies effectively assist a fledgling nation emerging from a near post-apocalyptic environment, especially when there are people willing to kill themselves on behalf of others, or even God, to stop it?

KMNB Operations Continue

3 RCR Battalion Group and ISTAR Company switched back to security operations in their respective areas of operation. During the loya jirga operations, a number of Key Entry Points (KEPs) were identified around the city. Working with the Kabul City Police, ISAF units conducted snap vehicle checkpoint searches in the vicinity of these entry points. These operations were deemed successful in deterring a variety of anti-government activities, so the KEPs were institutionalized and designated using letters. Once the CIMIC Platoon went in and talked to local leaders, Canadian engineers built infrastructure at the KEPs for the police and laid out traffic control measures.² Joint vehicle checkpoints were then conducted between 3 RCR, ISTAR Company, and the police. This coalesced as Operation ROME.³ (See Figure 5-1)

One of the KEPs, Echo, was located just outside the ISAF area of operations between Wardak province and Paghman district. The Kabul City Police liked this area because of the constricted terrain, which made it easier to control incoming traffic. When 3 RCR sought DCDS permission through the NCE to conduct Operation ROME tasks at KEP Echo, however, they were rebuffed. Here was an entry point on a route known to sustain opposition activity, but because it lay just on the other side of an artificial line, ISAF could not support the police.⁴

Operation ROME had to continue at other KEPs. Some concerns were raised about the viability of some of the police in certain districts, specifically that police were using the KEPs to shake down citizens. ISTAR Company was tasked to conduct Operation SMOKEY and place covert surveillance on the KEPs to ascertain if this was true and if so, let the Kabul Chief of Police know what was going on.⁵

The first iteration of Operation GONDOLA took place in a media frenzy on 15 January 2004. Operation GONDOLA was Canadian support to the heavy weapons cantonment programme. The significance of artillery in Kabul was symbolic on many levels. The misuse of artillery against the civilian population by the factions in the 1992-1993 fighting imprinted itself in public memory. As a result, one of the first Afghan militia organizations to be cantoned was 88 Artillery Brigade. 3 RCR, supported by ISTAR Company and the NCE, escorted 24 large caliber guns, 13 small caliber guns, three multiple-rocket launch systems, and 10 armoured fighting vehicles from their positions to the Rash Lahore cantonment site in Chahar Asiab district. Another convoy consisted of 11 multiple-rocket launchers, 27 pieces of artillery, and even anti-tank guided missile systems. GONDOLA was mounted with maximum media coverage and information operations support from ISAF HQ – very deliberately. These cantonments constituted a message to all players that the programme was serious and was no longer just talk. Cantonment was now underway and the momentum was about to build up. The message was: there would be no more factional armies reporting to unelected power brokers.⁶

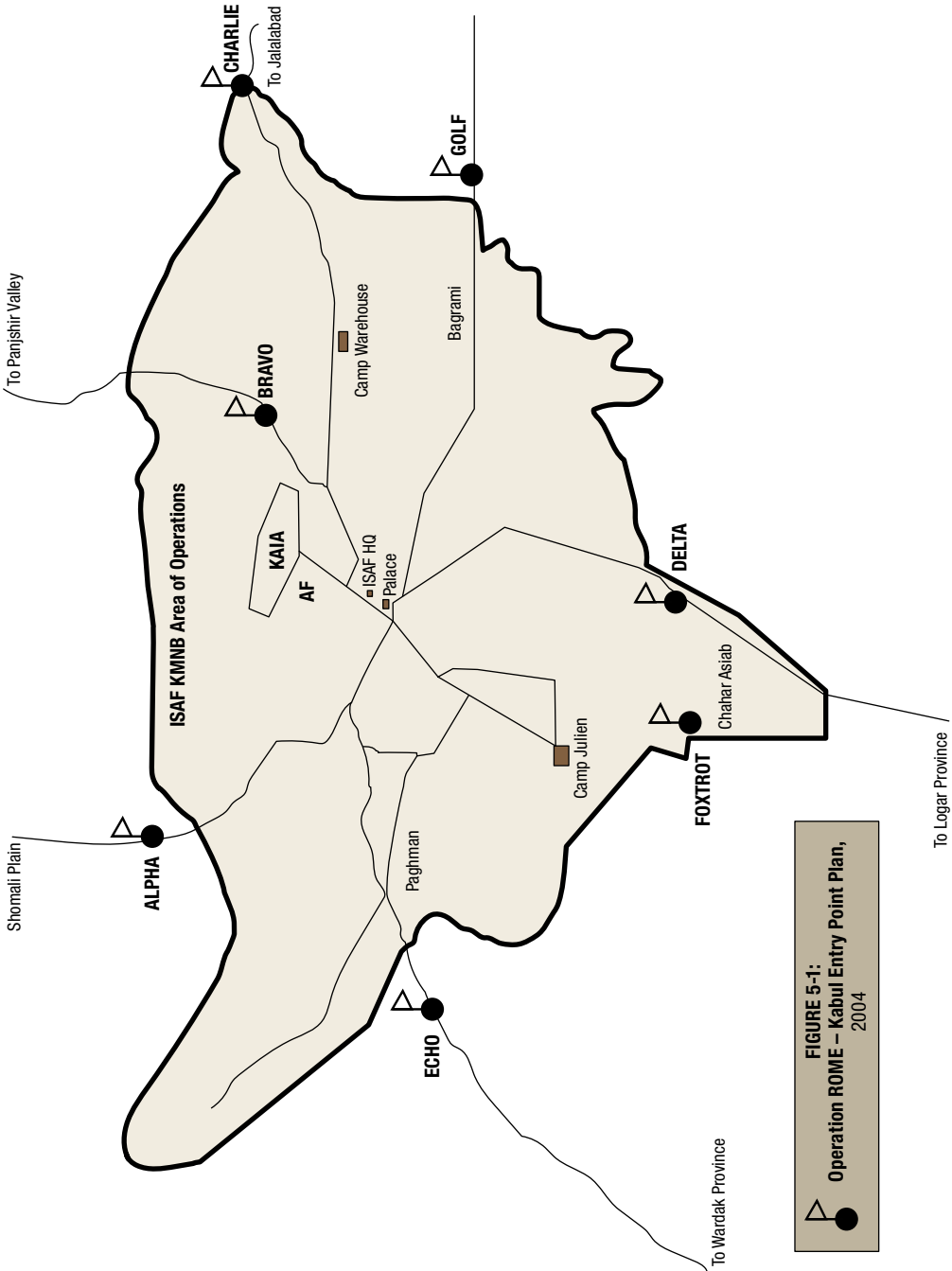


Figure 5-1: Operation ROME – Kabul Entry Point Plan, 2004



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-R103-1273d

The Canadian International Security Assistance Force contingent in Kabul worked closely with the Kabul police in the western districts of the city. The police slowly evolved from an untrained militia to a force capable of conducting counter-terrorism operations alongside ISAF.

3 RCR Battalion Group and ISTAR Company developed information that a compound in PD 7 was being used to support HiG activity. After the Short/Beerenfenger killings, anything HiG-related was high priority for 3 RCR, so a plan was formulated to use the Kabul City Police as the ‘knock.’ Operation TSUNAMI was mounted on 18 January 2004 and led to the apprehension of HiG personnel whose information was exploited against other HiG cells, some of which were involved in narco-trafficking.⁷ Another target then popped up on the scope on 25 January and 3 RCR prepared Operation WHIRLWIND to apprehend him. Working with the National Directorate of Security, two raids were conducted in the Canadian area of operations that netted three terrorists, including Abdul Maruf, and a substantial cache of weapons. CIMIC Platoon deployed to handle effects mitigation in the neighbourhoods.⁸

Suicide Attacks: The Murphy Killing and its Aftermath, 27 January 2004

Two Iltis vehicles with six soldiers departed Camp Julien, and headed for a CIMIC meeting at Kabul City Police Headquarters. Less than two kilometres from the Canadian camp on Route GREEN, a civilian vehicle flashed its lights and alerted an ambush party that an ISAF patrol was headed their way. The patrol slowed down to pass through a small ditch. As the first Iltis moved through and out, the second vehicle slowed down. A man carrying two 76mm projectiles strapped to him walked up beside the second Iltis and detonated his bomb just feet from the front of the vehicle. Cpl Jamie Murphy was killed instantly and three other Canadians were wounded. One Afghan civilian died and nine were wounded. A QRF column including a Bison ambulance and a mobile recovery team secured the site and evacuated the casualties.⁹

While TF KABUL reeled from the shock of the attack, a British patrol accompanying an Estonian EOD team down Route Violet was bombed the next day with a suicide vehicle-borne IED. This attack killed a British soldier and seriously wounded three British and two Estonians. There was a pattern: both attacks were in the morning, both were suicide bombings and both stricken vehicles were open-topped, soft-skinned vehicles operating on regularly patrolled and travelled ISAF main service routes.¹⁰ There was a threat warning of another suicide attack targeted against Kabul airport, but nothing happened – five explosions were heard south of the civilian terminal.¹¹ It is probable that Operation WHIRLWIND prevented or otherwise interfered with that attack in some way.

This was the third suicide attack conducted in Kabul since the German bus bombing and the first against a Canadian target. There was no confusion, no ambiguity this time. This was a deliberate act conducted by an individual with the express purpose of killing and maiming. The question in Afghanistan, of course, was why. And, as with the Jowz Valley attack, there was no easy answer. Outright terrorism to degrade ISAF capability, fair enough, that was understandable; the common link was ISAF, but was it ‘messaging’? If so, what was the message? If it was retaliatory in nature, there were several recent possible reasons that ISAF staff had to consider. First, it could have been HiG retaliating for the severe takedown of its networks in Kabul, but HiG did not tend toward suicide bombing at this point in the war. Second, it could have been messaging related to heavy weapons cantonment or retaliation for Operation POWER PLAY. It was probably not loya jirga-related, or the attack would have been conducted during the event. One theory was that Al Qaeda and the Taliban were tired of HiG failures and came in to show them how to do the job properly. And, as before, some complex combination of reasons may have been behind the attacks. There was circumstantial information linking two key anti-Taliban personalities in Kabul with the mullah who provided a safe house to the bomber the night before the attack, but there was no street-level “chatter” after the Murphy killing as there had been after the Short/Beerenfenger killings.¹²



The Cold War-era jeep, the Iltis, reached the limits of its capability in Kabul in 2003. Suicide IED attacks against open, 'soft' vehicles were responsible for the deaths of several International Security Assistance Force troops, including Canadians. The decision was made to dispose of these vehicles in 2004.

In-bound Canadian C-130s carrying BGen Jocelyn Lacroix and his replacement staff for KMNB were diverted to Bagram Air Field. In another incident, a Coyote rolled over, trapping two soldiers, which generated another QRF from Camp Julien. The KMNB alert state went red. Non-armoured vehicles were restricted in their movements – Canadian B echelon vehicles like medium and heavy logistics vehicles wheeled trucks, were not permitted to leave their locations. The two infantry companies riding around in Iltis were also restricted – there were only so many Bison armoured personnel carriers to go around and it was fortunate that LCol Denne was insistent that more be brought into theatre after the Short/Beerenfenger killings. This left the LAV III Company as the only organization that could get out and about in the Canadian area of operations. CIMIC and psychological operations ground to a halt, no projects could be done. Patrolling was restricted. It took several days to get B vehicles back to Camp Julien. In time, the electrical and mechanical engineers from the NSE worked night and day to modify the trucks with up-armour kits after a technical assistance visit made its recommendations.¹³

The two attacks had immediate negative effects on KMNB and its units' ability to operate in the city. Some of these effects lasted a week, while others had more long-term impact. The plan to use ISAF forces to work with election officials and identify voter registration sites for the 2004 elections was now delayed. Most importantly, President Karzai removed the head of the NDS, Engineer Muhammad Arif Sarwari.

The attacks forced 3 RCR to refocus their resources on force protection. Operation HYDRA was established to monitor Route Green. The pending redeployment of Roto 0 and the influx of Roto 1 meant that even more resources, including those from ISTAR Company, would be employed in protecting troop convoys travelling from Camp Julien all the way to Kabul Afghanistan International Airport and back. All in all, 3 RCR's work in West Kabul, let alone the western districts, was curtailed, including CIMIC activities. LCol Denne's ability to mount robust patrolling, and to message the population and the enemy was equally threatened. At the same time, the vehicle off road rate for ISTAR Company's Coyotes dramatically increased into February, which also affected surveillance coverage. The Royal Canadian Dragoons Coyotes were wearing out and the NSE mechanics worked endlessly to keep them going in the austere and dusty Kabul environment.¹⁴



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-R102-075a

The decision to dispose of the Iltis resulted in the acquisition of the Light Utility Vehicle Wheeled, better known as the G Wagon. The G Wagons served in both Kabul and Kandahar.

Re-thinking Explosive Ordnance and Improvised Explosive Device Disposal Operations

The two different types of attacks against 3 RCR forced a re-examination of how the Canadian Army looked at EOD and counter-IED capabilities. Culturally, ammunition technicians handled ordnance disposal and worked for a logistics battalion, while combat engineers handled mine clearance and worked for field squadrons. There was significantly increased overlap between the two tasks in Afghanistan and, with the introduction of the IED threat, there had to be some form of rapprochement and deconfliction.¹⁵

The engineer squadron for both Roto 0 and Roto 1 possessed mine clearance and EOD equipment. For the most part, these were several systems acquired for stabilization operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. The Marion Mine Flail was a light tractor-based system that was underpowered. There was another vehicle that pushed a Pearson scatterable munitions clearance device (basically a plough); it was equipped with a forward-looking infrared system and a magnetic detector system. Later on, two remotely piloted M-113s equipped with Pearson rollers replaced these vehicles. As well, two Nyalas (mine-resistant South African vehicles with V-shaped hulls) were used to “prove” routes by driving along them until they hit something. Three Vanguard Mk 1 light EOD robots were also deployed, loaded in specially equipped Bison armoured personnel carriers. None of these systems were designed to deal with IEDs: they were used to clear unexploded ordnance and mines in a relatively permissive environment.¹⁶

It took some time for the Canadian Forces to react to the new threats and move away from the damage caused by post-Cold War cuts to Canadian EOD capability and the 1990s emphasis on peace support operations.¹⁷ Two months after the Murphy killing, the policy level in Ottawa finally accepted that “Anti-ISAF elements have attained a level of technological sophistication that has not previously been encountered by Canadian Forces troops on operations.” This technological sophistication centred on the detonation systems associated with IED. Therefore, technological means had to be found to interfere with those systems. This meant the acquisition and deployment of electronic countermeasure (ECM) systems.¹⁸

ECM at the ground tactical level was not new; the British Army had employed ECM in Northern Ireland since the 1980s. Canadian EOD personnel used low-power ECM during ordnance disposal operations as a matter of course and had done so for many years before Afghanistan. The Americans first encountered radio-controlled IEDs in Afghanistan in 2002 and initially had no means of dealing with them. The U.S. Navy had stocks of obsolete jamming systems from the Cold War; these were modified for use in American vehicles and the system was code-named ACORN. The process from identification of the problem to deployment of the ACORN system took three months.¹⁹



Photo Credit: Author

The Telerob explosive ordnance disposal and observation robot, seen here nestled in the back of a Bison armoured personnel carrier, was employed by Canadian personnel in Kabul in the fight against improvised explosive devices, unexploded explosive ordnance, and mines.



Photo Credit: DND IS2004-0665a

The improvised explosive device and mine threat in Kabul and later in Kandahar led to the deployment of Nyala route-proving vehicles from Canadian units in Bosnia. Nyalas led the way on International Security Assistance Force and later Provincial Reconstruction Team convoys in remote areas.

It was clear to some that ECM would have to be introduced throughout the force. This was technically challenging, especially when ECM had to be deconflicted with the Signals Squadron and its operations, the electronic warfare people, and so on. A meeting of minds was required between the engineer community and the signals community back in Canada as well as in theatre to prevent radio frequency spectrum ‘fratricide.’ Acquisition of the right systems, in the right numbers, and through what amounted to a peacetime defence acquisition process was equally challenging. Canada was already behind the curve on the anti-IED war and had to catch up.

Nouveau Sheriff in Town: Operation ATHENA Roto 1 Arrives

The transition from Operation ATHENA Roto 0 to Roto 1 took place in early February 2004. MGen Andrew Leslie stepped down as DComd ISAF. By this time, serious lobbying on Canada’s part paid off and Canada gained command of ISAF. LGen Rick Hillier took over from Lt Gen Gliemerth.²⁰

Command of KMNB was retained by Canada and passed from BGen Peter Devlin to BGen Jocelyn Lacroix. Maj Dyrald Cross handed over ISTAR Company to Maj Andrew “Z” Zdunich and the *12^e Régiment blindé du Canada* (12 RBC) Recce Squadron. LCol Don Denne’s 3 RCR Battalion Group was replaced with LCol Stephane Roy’s *3^e Bataillon du Royal 22^e Régiment* (3eR22eR). R Battery from *5^e Régiment d’artillerie légère du Canada* (5 RALC) replaced F Battery. The new NSE commander was LCol Serge Carignan with the bulk of the new staff arriving from 5e Brigade units in Quebec. 52e Escadron, *5^e Régiment du génie de combat* (RGC) became the force engineers.

The most important difference in the Roto 1 command and control relationships was the amplification of the TF KABUL commander’s role. LGen Hillier was Commander ISAF, but not double-hatted as the Canadian contingent commander as MGen Leslie had been. Col Alain Tremblay was the contingent commander for Roto 1. His predecessor for Roto 0, Col Mark Hodgson, had been the deputy contingent commander with a smaller staff. The commander’s staffs were beefed up as well – LCol Sylvain Sirois became the Chief of Staff. There were a number of reasons for this significant change. The CDS, General Ray Henault, was concerned that any incident involving Canadian troops in Afghanistan might have negative effects on the pending national elections in Canada and sought to limit the possibility of that happening. This view was expressed to the task force commander through the DCDS, who was already placing limits on Canadian Army activities in Afghanistan back in 2001.²¹



Photo Credit: DND K-A2003-A407D

LGen Rick Hillier took over as Commander International Security Assistance Force. Hillier was forced to rely on non-Canadian troops in Kabul because of increased concern over potential Canadian casualties.

Additionally, elements in NDHQ and elsewhere did not like MGen Leslie's relative autonomy and/or how he used it and sought to curtail that autonomy for commanders in subsequent rotations. Others in the new headquarters disagreed with the concept of operations as it had evolved in 2003 and thought that DDR/heavy weapons cantonment, the ETT and the 'night work' were things that the Canadians should not necessarily be doing because they were, in their view, politically risky. In retrospect, these views reflected an insular, limited-liability "peacekeeping" mentality from the 1990s that was not in tune with the realities of the situation on the ground in Kabul. In effect, the headquarters became, according to LCol Sirosis, "DCDS forward."²² The TF KABUL commander's brief, as summed up by Col Tremblay, was to protect Canadian interests, not necessarily to ensure tactical success.²³

The new command relationships posed significant problems for Canadian and ISAF operations in Kabul. There were new mechanisms put in place at the TF Kabul HQ to vet all non-framework operations conducted by Canadian troops in Kabul. An Operations Board was established at the headquarters for that function. Only after that board made a positive recommendation would a request be sent back to the DCDS and then the CDS for approval. Neither the new Commander ISAF nor the new Commander KMNB liked having their autonomy limited by this bureaucratic process.²⁴

There were also disagreements on force structure that ultimately were aggravated by the new processes. For example, there were two schools of thought in the mounting organizations in Canada relating to Recce Squadron as Roto 1 worked out its structure in the fall of 2003 prior to deployment. One school of thought held that all Canadian sub-units needed to be commanded by the battalion and that the force should not be divided. The other school of thought was that Recce Squadron was a brigade resource and should be commanded and employed by the brigade headquarters.²⁵ This was not a new doctrinal problem, as seen with Operation APOLLO, and was a legacy issue from the Army's Stabilization Force rotations in Bosnia. Manning of the battalion group was based on Recce Squadron being part of it and when it was employed elsewhere, this caused problems as the infantry battalion didn't bring its recce platoon along. Similarly, no one thought to man the force properly to continue the ETT task.

The manning cap imposed by the Ottawa process produced a situation where force employers and force generators fought over what amounted to 10 or 20 personnel slots here and five or 10 there. Each corps or branch had its doctrinal structures and when those were modified (that is, reduced in all cases) to fit into the cap, it generated competition, almost all of which was unhealthy. These disagreements emerged during training and, when coupled to the new command arrangements, escalated into personality conflicts between the Canadian commanders, which in turn had a negative impact on Canadian operations in Kabul.

For the most part, the battalion group, ISTAR Company, KMNB HQ and troops, the National Command and National Support Elements were all structurally similar to the previous rotation. The All Source Intelligence Centre was removed from KMNB and made a Canadian national asset under the NCE. This was done ostensibly because of complexities related to handling intelligence material not releasable to other NATO countries.

The new rotation was not manned to handle the Embedded Training Team mission and it took some weeks to convince Ottawa to deploy the additional 20 personnel necessary to replace the first iteration of that task. TF KABUL neglected to tell TF Phoenix that the ETTs were not scheduled to be replaced in Roto 1. “We are getting outstanding ‘bang for the buck’ in this endeavour,” Col Tremblay explained to Ottawa. “To get out of this commitment would give a black eye to Canada.” The new Commander ISAF, LGen Hillier, who also saw the positive benefits of maintaining the exceptional work done by the previous rotation, supported Tremblay in this. The new personnel eventually arrived in late February 2004 and set out mentoring a kandak from the Afghan National Army’s 1st Brigade.²⁶

Kabul Multinational Brigade and ISTAR Company Operations

When Maj Andrew Zdunich arrived and commenced operations, only 30% of his vehicles were functioning and none of the TUAV launchers were working – the TUAV troop was waiting for one airframe to be brought in from France.²⁷ 12 RBC’s patrolling was initially limited to Operation BASEBALL, the Route INDIGO surveillance task, where Coyotes worked alongside R Battery’s forward observation officer/forward air controller teams keeping “eyes on” that vital route. ISTAR Company looked toward establishing an observation post in downtown Kabul (Operation OLYMPUS) as there had been rockets fired at the critical installations sited on TV Hill. For the most part, ISTAR Company continued with the same tasks its predecessor organization conducted.

KMNB received some new units. The German CH-53 helicopter detachment moved up to Konduz to support the German PRT and a Turkish UH-60 detachment replaced it.²⁸ The Dutch allocated six AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to ISAF in Kabul – their firepower, ability to respond quickly, and surveillance capabilities were a welcome addition to the effort. In another development, Slovenia approached Canada to ‘nest’ a light reconnaissance platoon with Recce Squadron. This was approved and the Hummer-mounted platoon arrived, bedded down in Camp Julien, and commenced patrolling in May.

Direct action became a mainstay of ISAF operations as the terrorist threat continued throughout 2004. The enemy operation of choice was the IED attack, either suicide or radio-commanded (with almost no victim-operated attacks – yet). There were rocket

attacks, but it was never clear if these were all insurgency-based or not. Very rarely was there a direct fire ambush. As a result, a premium was placed on ISTAR Company and the ASIC with their connections to allied agencies in providing timely information on enemy networks. And then those networks had to be taken down. It is safe to argue that these types of operations became the forefront of ISAF operations in Kabul once the threat from the power brokers slowly receded throughout 2004.

The command and control arrangements and their relationship to direct action operations posed serious problems for the conduct of KMNB operations during Roto 1. Where MGen Leslie and BGen Devlin used a variety of means coupled with little fanfare to creatively bypass bureaucratic blockages, LGen Hillier and BGen Lacroix tended to meet them head on. Hillier's memoir is fairly blunt on the matter:

I did not turn to Canada as my go-to nation when I wanted a job done, because of the complex and cumbersome system in Ottawa and bureaucratic approach to operations. When we had missions that had to happen quickly, I went to my British contingent, I went to my Norwegian company and occasionally I went to the French battle group to get them done. Very seldom did I go to Canada. The time, detail, pain, and agony to get something done and the hand-wringing over it, were so extensive that I concluded it just wasn't worthwhile.... If I went to the Canadian battle group, it would take twelve to twenty-four hours to get Ottawa to approve their participation in the raid, assuming they did approve it. If I went to the British contingent or the Norwegians, they'd have the operation not just approved but carried out in less than two hours.²⁹

There were additional problems related to publicity. During the handover from Roto 0 to Roto 1, KMNB mounted Operation MAELSTROM. The target was an associate of Anwar Dargar, had linkages to the Pakistani ISI, and controlled a 10-man cell. Information suggested that he was preparing eight vehicle bombs and the primary targets were the American ambassador and the American embassy complex. Afghan security forces (ANSF), which included the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, were in the first row, while the French battle group was the second row support. Canada provided the sensitive site exploitation team to exploit the site, while the Sperwer TUAV orbited in a surveillance pattern over PD 11. Operation MAELSTROM went in on 14 February 2004, grabbed the target, and successfully exploited the bomb-making site.³⁰ Media representatives asked questions about the operation, which raised questions about national caveats and thus national limitations. Some wanted to go along on direct action operations but national sensitivities precluded them from doing so – and ISAF HQ, the Canadian National Command Element Centre and KMNB HQ could not explain why without revealing operational detail.

CHAPTER FIVE



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-A018D



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-A024D

Increased terrorist operations conducted by Hezb-e Islami, Taliban, and Al Qaeda cells led to aggressive disruption operations coordinated by Kabul Multinational Brigade and the Canadian ISTAR and ASIC organizations. These operations led to the apprehension or elimination of terrorist cells before they could affect the emergent political process.

As Commander KMNB, BGen Lacroix was instrumental in improving the relationships between the ANSF and ISAF, particularly as it related to intelligence flow and direct action operations. The installation of Amrullah Saleh as National Directorate of Security chief after the 27-28 January attacks was a significant development. BGen Lacroix approached Saleh, the Kabul Chief of Police, and the commander of the Kabul Garrison to set up a meeting between the four entities. Lacroix was immediately taken aback with accusations from the Afghans that there was a lack of information sharing from ISAF KMNB to their respective agencies. And of course, there was not, as trust had not been consistently built up yet between the personalities. BGen Devlin had rapport with some Afghans and “created the environment” for Lacroix to build on, but, as Lacroix learned, that was not necessarily transferable to him because he had not been there long enough and was not known as well as Devlin – yet. KMNB used the ISAF change of command ceremony security arrangements coordination as a means to build up trust by asking the Afghans to take the lead. After the successful conclusion of the operation, the head of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul met with Lacroix for several hours and essentially opened the doors to the substantial body of information they retained. From then on, KMNB/National Directorate of Security cooperation steadily improved. During this time, the number of direct action operations in Kabul increased from six in Roto 0 to 30 in Roto 1.³¹

Then there was the issue of national caveats. Several ISAF nations had weak minority governments that were sensitized to any problem that might emerge from their personnel killing or detaining people – or their personnel being killed or detained and later eviscerated. At the same time, some national contingents did not follow the Canadian six-month tour, or were otherwise out of phase with the Canadian rotation. For example, the French had a four-month rotation, while the Germans had six months, and the Dutch helicopter unit changed every two months between Afghanistan and Iraq. This meant that there was constant turbulence in knowledge of rules of engagement, national limitations, and type A personalities, all hampered by the use of several European languages. Some nations would not operate alongside or under the control of other nations, for whatever historical reasons. This meant that ISAF HQ and KMNB had to develop a matrix so they could select a force as quickly as possible to conduct a particular mission under time constraints. Unfortunately, the Canadian battalion group was one of the ones that were constrained the most. ISTAR Company and the ASIC were not; since they “watched” and did not kick down doors, they were low-risk from a political perspective in Ottawa. A typical direct action ‘package’ might consist of Canadian Coyotes and a German LUNA UAV, with the National Directorate of Security kicking down the door and the neighbourhood or compound cordoned off with the Norwegian company. The Canadian ASIC or its British equivalent might handle the exploitation of the site.³²

An example was Operation SPEED conducted in late March 2004. The National Directorate of Security developed information that explosives were about to be brought into the city through Western District by an individual who had connections to both HiG and Al Qaeda. The target compound was in the Canadian area of operations. The National Directorate of Security, through its newly invigorated connections with KMNB, asked for support. KMNB was unable to get the Canadian contingent to react in time (72 hours), so it tasked the British Patrol Company to provide the cordon for the National Directorate of Security. The 13-man sensitive site exploitation team was Canadian, with British EOD, Military Police, and K-9 teams supporting the effort. Three men from the cell were apprehended and a substantial amount of bomb-making materials was discovered.³³ Here was a major terrorist target, right inside the Canadian area, and 3eR22eR had to be left out of the operation while British forces had to be brought in. Situations like this had the potential to undermine Canadian credibility.

A follow-on operation, HAMMER, was mounted by a combined KMNB/National Directorate of Security force three days after SPEED. It netted five insurgents. An unrelated operation, SWIFT, was a combined Kabul City Police/KMNB operation that hit three sites simultaneously throughout the city. Explosives were uncovered at all locations. Canadian participation approximated that in Operation SPEED. These operations significantly degraded HiG and associated allies' terrorist activities in March and well into April 2004.³⁴

There were unanticipated information sources that developed as the Canadian units encountered the population both on patrol and through CIMIC activity. In addition to human intelligence operations, commanders found more and more that "information collected by CIMIC teams from [non-governmental organizations] and [international organizations] has allowed [CIMIC] to collect information to help with the planning of directed operations as well as operations conducted outside of the area of operations."³⁵ The idea of fusing CIMIC information from the CIMIC Coordination Cell and ASIC was a new angle that needed development and refinement – but would pose problems later on.

With the expansion in the number of direct action operations in the area of operations in 2004, the issue of what to do with Afghans detained during operations once again emerged as Col Tremblay explained to the DCDS:

The issue of questioning and handling Afghan detainees was also difficult. ... TFK applied common sense and followed all international and national laws and protocols in handling detainees. However, TFK does not yet possess an appropriate facility for the handling and questioning of Afghan detainees. Given the recent scandal in Iraq, this issue is far from being resolved.³⁶

The 3eR22eR Battalion Group Operations

Once LCol Roy and the soldiers of the 3eR22eR Battalion Group were on the ground, they eased into the new environment with a series of patrols designed to deter criminal activity in PD 7 and PD 14. 3eR22eR was structured similarly to 3 RCR: one LAV III company and two light companies that had Iltis. There was also an independent LAV III troop. 3eR22eR brought over more TOW systems (six vice two in the previous rotation) mounted again in Iltis and controlled by the Anti-Armour Platoon. Like 3 RCR, 3eR22eR had a dedicated CIMIC Platoon and a combat engineer squadron, 52e Escadron, from 5 RGC.³⁷

The Iltis-based companies were obviously problematic in the new IED environment, at least until a replacement vehicle could be acquired and deployed. Another limitation was certifying the Improvised Explosive Device Disposal teams, who now had to update their knowledge base and procedures after they arrived in theatre. Both factors reduced 3eR22eR's patrolling reach in the Canadian area of responsibility for the early weeks of the deployment.³⁸

Given the situation, what could 3eR22eR do to continue to maintain a stable environment? One solution was to work with the Kabul City Police, assist them when needed and improve their capacity where necessary. The Key Entry Point plan was still in effect. Operation COBRA became the codename for 3eR22eR –Kandahar City Police joint vehicle checkpoints and other measures associated with using these zones to generate unpredictability in the minds of those seeking to infiltrate the city. 3eR22eR developed a plan whereby they would randomly man KEPs D, E and F, overtly or covertly observing from a distance. The issue was KEP E as it lay outside the ISAF area of operations and Ottawa would not give permission for 3eR22eR to move what amounted to 500 to 1 000 metres west toward Maidan Shar. When the Kabul City Police found out that 3eR22eR was unable to go with them to KEP E, they went home, leaving KEP E wide open to whoever wanted to drive in from HiG-infested Wardak province.³⁹ LGen Hillier, frustrated with the situation, declared that KEP E was inside of a temporary extension of the ISAF area of operations for specific windows of 3eR22eR activity, in an attempt to put end to this nonsense – to no avail.⁴⁰

Operation LOUP GAROU, a saturation of PD 14 with 3eR22eR, went in to deter criminal activity. CIMIC and the Field Security Team noted that the 3eR22eR emphasis on police support was producing inadvertent effects. Some of the Afghans thought that ISAF was there to replace the police, not supplement them, which generated questions among the local leaders as to who had the power. This state of affairs potentially undermined the authority of the police. The subtleties of second row support were lost on a population that saw any armed group as the local power. Indeed, relations with the Kabul City Police were also deteriorating: “policemen were less inclined to patrol with 3eR22eR” and this

had a noticeable effect on reducing police presence in the Canadian area of operations.⁴¹ By early April 2004, the police in PD 14 were intimidating the population and presenting an anti-ISAF attitude. And no one was exactly sure why.⁴²



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-R101-458

After nearly two years of operations in Afghanistan, Canadian patrols eventually were equipped with Arid CADPAT uniforms but it took some time for the procurement system to acquire arid CADPAT equipment.

Fortunately, Ottawa was able to get moving on the Iltis replacement issue. In March 2004, 60 of the new vehicles, dubbed the Light Utility Vehicle Wheeled and better known to the soldiers as the G Wagon, were scheduled to be flown in from Graz, Austria on four chartered heavy-lift flights. The downside was that machine guns and TOW weapons systems could not be mounted on them because of the design.⁴³ At the very least, the armour package was superior to that of the Iltis, which had none. The issue of how to handle the environmental aspects of the defunct Iltis fleet now caused handwringing in some quarters who thought the vehicles should be flown home at great expense to be disposed of. Cooler heads prevailed and determined that the Iltis fleet would be scrapped in Kabul.

Toward the end of March, 3eR22eR was finally permitted to be involved in a directed operation. Information came in that the Taliban established a covert cache in the Western District consisting of 35 vehicle-loads of weapons just before the Northern Alliance drove them from the city. A shopkeeper, who had been a cook with the Taliban,

was placed in charge to watch it. 3eR22eR was to work with the Kabul City Police to establish a cordon, while 52 Escadron's EOD/IEDD teams accompanied the police. Operation SCORPION went down on 29 March. Five people were detained – all were released by the police. No weapons were found, but aluminum powder used in the construction of IEDs, ISAF documents relating to the Constitutional Loya Jirga plus a photograph of General Gliemerth were discovered during the sensitive site exploitation phase.⁴⁴

The CIMIC Platoon, working with the Legal Advisor, was prepared to handle “damage control” if necessary after these operations: this was reminiscent of the more traditional CIMIC role from the Cold War. The 3eR22eR Battalion Group leveraged 52e Escadron in support of its CIMIC plan. There was a huge amount of unexploded ordnance in West Kabul after years of war. Operation VENDANGE was designed to improve the security of the local population through the removal and destruction of unexploded ordnance. This involved educating the population via information operations support from KMNB and ISAF HQ, plus a turn-in programme and a response plan. It also involved transporting ammo to the Pol-e Charkhi ammunition storage site and ongoing rotational security for the site.⁴⁵



Photo Credit: DND KA2004-RT03-1593 L

Attacks on International Security Assistance Force vehicles led to increased armoured vehicle use. After a lethal attack on a German Army bus which killed and wounded over thirty soldiers, Bison armoured personnel carriers were used to convoy personnel to and from Kabul Afghanistan International Airport.



Photo Credit: DND IS2004-2066a

The lack of its own medium-lift helicopter capability, the result of short-sighted decisions taken in the 1990s, forced the Canadian ISAF contingent to rely on German CH-53s for airmobile operations as well as medical evacuation.

Civil-Military Cooperation, Canadian International Development Agency, and Development

Col Tremblay, the TF KABUL commander, was increasingly concerned about force protection in and around Camp Julien. In the early stages of the mission, he sought to synergize Canadian resources and capacity to develop community relations as part of that effort. 3 RCR had a CIMIC programme in place, and 3R22eR took up where that left off. However, TF KABUL developed a broader plan called the Community Improvement Programme (CIP).

This programme built on 3 RCR CIMIC foundations but sought to bring an even more systematic process to the problem; its stated objective was “to re-establish, rehabilitate, and reconstruct some of the infrastructure necessary to sustain a community.”⁴⁶ The problem, as it turned out, was the size of the “community” – Canada and KMNB were dealing with hundreds of thousands of people in West Kabul with a Canadian CIMIC Platoon, and a Norwegian CIMIC Platoon. The Community Improvement Programme was supposed to influence the population within the five to 10-kilometre band around Camp Julien, while KMNB and ISAF CIMIC were supposed to handle the rest of the area of operations. 3R22eR CIMIC wound up working everywhere.

Col Tremblay told the medical staff to get outside the camp and start doing local clinics. The field ambulance personnel conducted these in civilian clothes to lower their profile. The clinics also included female nurses. The Legal Advisors became the *de facto* grievance staff: if the local population had an issue, they were told to pass it on to the Legal Advisor, who held meetings with local leaders. The engineers integrated their unexploded ordnance clean-up programme, Operation VENDANGE, with the Community Improvement Programme.⁴⁷

The CIMIC Platoon carried on where its predecessors left off. For the most part, CIMIC focused on: well-drilling and repairs to pump houses and systems; the renovation of buildings so they could be used for education and the provision of educational equipment; the identification and provision of garbage collection sites; and the renovation of fire halls and the rehabilitation of firefighting equipment.⁴⁸

Notably, CIMIC was also able to provide high-frequency communications to the police in a number of districts. CIDA however, was unwilling or unable to release funds to assist the police, and it appeared that the Germans, who were responsible for police training and support, were doing little or nothing when it came to police support in Western Kabul. This was yet another precursor to problems that were encountered in Kandahar in 2005 when the Canadian PRT attempted to improve the state of policing.⁴⁹ CIMIC also tried to develop synergies and coordination with non-governmental aid organizations. The idea of working with non-governmental organizations, however, proved problematic:

The [CIP] program was not able to serve as a catalyst to lead other NGOs into areas. The program was not able to integrate itself into an already-established NGO community. Roto 1 established contact with several NGOs and attempted to work jointly with them.... CIMIC organization planned and conducted three different meetings on Camp Julien with several NGOs in an attempt to harmonize our respective efforts. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to enact joint projects with NGOs because CIMIC is focusing on short-term small-scale, large-impact projects whereas NGOs are implementing projects over a much longer period.... It is recommended that CIMIC work more closely with private industries, as they tend to focus on reconstruction activities and they generally possess superior management skills and are efficient at implementing projects.⁵⁰

As for CIMIC/CIDA connectivity, the CIMIC/CIDA interface did not progress significantly during this rotation: the CIMIC Platoon was involved with 140 small-scale community impact projects in the first three months of operations; 11 legacy projects from 3 RCR rotation were completed; 39 more projects were identified by 3eR22eR CIMIC Platoon; and 15 had to be cancelled. Accessing CIDA monies remained problematic:

The approval of CIDA funding for CIMIC projects is viewed as overly cumbersome and bureaucratic, to the point where it becomes extremely difficult to spend what amounts to small sums of money.... The fact that a clearly defined envelope of operational funds for CIMIC projects was not provided from the outset generated significant increase in the workload of the battalion group CIMIC/Liaison organization. Indeed, CIMIC personnel had to conduct a blitz in the early stages of the tour to identify and develop projects that could be potentially financed by Task Force Kabul funds without being sure of the availability of those funds.... CIMIC must be able to exploit fleeting opportunities that support the commander's intent but may not be in line with CIDA's funding scheme.⁵¹

Notably,

Harmonizing CIDA objectives and military objectives was a constant challenge. The issue of CIMIC being a "branch" of CIDA and having to implement CIDA policies and objectives needs to be addressed. The CIMIC goals of force protection and moving towards a desired end-state appear to be in conflict with some of CIDA's goals – specifically the CIDA goal of ensuring "gender equality" issues. It was a difficult task for this mission, especially in a society where the pursuance of gender equality could have created tension, since it appeared that this society might not yet be in a position to tackle this sensitive issue.⁵²

DND and NDHQ did not handle the issue of CIMIC/CIDA/NGO interaction well. The same problems encountered by MGen Leslie on Roto 0 regarding accessing monies plagued Roto 1. More importantly, elements in the DCDS organization were increasingly worried about “optics.” In this case, there was a debate over how “active” CIMIC could or should be as a force protection mechanism. These people were concerned that 3eR22eR’s use of CIMIC to collect information might jeopardize relationships within the non-governmental organization community and “polarize the Canadian Forces from certain agencies in the [non-governmental and international organization] community.”

The DCDS replied, stating that:

Recognizing that Force Protection is the primary goal of the proposed activities, projects that propose the use of CIMIC as an active means of information gathering cannot be supported. To avoid jeopardizing current and future CIMIC interaction with NGOs and other non-military organizations the CIMIC doctrinal premise of information gathering and the establishment of goodwill being spin-off benefits, not direct goals, needs to be adhered to.⁵³

Was CIMIC in Afghanistan to support CIDA and the non-governmental organizations, or was CIMIC in Afghanistan to support the Canadian Army’s deployed contingent that was supporting the Afghan Transitional Administration? The DCDS and others mistakenly assumed that the goals of various non-governmental organizations coincided with Canadian and Afghan Transitional Administration goals and then tacitly determined that Canada’s relations with non-governmental organizations globally somehow were more important than CIMIC operations designed to protect Canadian soldiers in the lethal environment that was Kabul. The idea that Canadians should be put at risk out of fear of criticism from a non-Canadian organization or organizations, entities unelected by the Canadian people and not subject to the Canadian democratic process, beggars the imagination. This problem demanded high-level interdepartmental policy discussion and clarification from the elected government in Canada – but it was not effectively addressed at this time and it had long-term implications when Canada took over the Kandahar PRT. A larger but unasked question that fell out of this problem was which Canadian government department had the priority in Afghanistan when their missions conflicted: DND, DFAIT, or CIDA? There was no mechanism in 2004 to sort this out either in Kabul or Ottawa and again, this had long-term effects in Kandahar later on.

The Strategic Dimension

As the new Canadian units took over in Kabul, they arrived just in time to observe massive upheavals for the Afghan Transition Administration as it fought to establish a legitimate government in the face of multiple threats. As with the previous rotation under MGen Leslie and BGen Devlin, the new Canadian commanders were confronted with a plethora of potentially catastrophic situations that had to be addressed with a combination of guile and adroit manoeuvring. And, as before, Canadians found themselves at the centre of all of these processes in Kabul and beyond. There were five of them. The first one was the ongoing heavy weapons cantonment operation in Kabul: it was in progress by February 2004. Heavy weapons cantonment removed the weapons that were a direct threat to stability in the capital, and significantly contributed to stability during the political deliberations in December and January 2004, but it did not address the presence of the power brokers' forces in the city itself. That was the job of DDR, and that programme had not made a lot of headway. The artillery, tanks, and anti-aircraft systems were progressively being cantoned, and that was good, but there were several thousand men with small arms still in the city. They had to be demobilized too. Second, weapons cantonment or DDR processes had not been established for the rest of the country, particularly the increasingly volatile north and northwest Afghan provinces where the fault lines between the various Northern Alliance forces were located. There were other power brokers out there and as the Afghan Transitional Administration and ISAF expanded, there would be friction. Third, there was the issue of elections. The size, shape, form, timing, and methodology had to be established and implemented. Fourth and barely perceptible in February–March 2004, there was a Taliban insurgency lurking in the background. Fifth, HiG and Al Qaeda continued to conduct urban terrorism in Kabul. Both of these last two matters had to be addressed in a more systematic fashion.

The critical, central piece of the puzzle were the elections. The international community was not going to invest in the reconstruction of Afghanistan if there was not a legitimate government in place. That would simply be a waste of resources. Afghanistan had to compete with a variety of countries in Africa and Asia for increasingly scarce relief monies – and many of those countries actually had governments of varying capacities. The UN or the European Union, for example, was not going to make deals with men like Dostum, Sayyaf, or Fahim, nor was the International Monetary Fund nor the World Bank. At the same time, the non-governmental relief organizations generally despised the power brokers and preferred to deal with an internationally recognized government that had UN support. There was growing pressure from the non-governmental organizations on various governments to back the Afghan Transitional Administration, and thus the electoral process. Note that neither aid communities were in a position to consult the Afghan people and ask what they wanted; both groups were caught up in their own standards of practice developed outside Afghanistan

and were imposing their paradigms on the situation – thus the need for elections and elected Afghan representatives to work with. Afghanistan had to have the machinery to be able to re-join the world community and thus derive benefits from those relationships – and it was not yet in that position in 2004.

Of particular note, the problem of counter-narcotics and where it fit into the larger scheme of things must be mentioned. In a very general sense, the Western European powers were particularly concerned with the flow of opium and its derivatives from the region westwards. This was not a new problem – it existed back in the 1960s. In this case, however, there was a belief in some quarters that a new Afghan government might be able to shut off the flow of opium from Afghanistan. The main proponents of this were the British government and elements within the U.S. State Department and law enforcement community who essentially viewed Afghanistan as an Asian Colombia. A variety of counter-narcotics programmes led by the British and funded by the U.S. State Department emerged as the Afghans worked out their new policing structures. For all intents and purposes, these programmes appeared as if they were designed to assist the Afghan Transitional Administration with stability inside Afghanistan but their primary purpose was to serve other nation's domestic political agendas related to drug consumption.

The combination of Afghan Transitional Administration and international community initiatives and programmes presented a serious threat to the power brokers. Mentoring and expanding the Afghan National Army, combined with removal of militia heavy weapons, coupled to the demobilization of the militias themselves, took away the power brokers' primary coercive tools. Holding elections would potentially shift the allegiances of the people that were currently under their control by allowing those people choice. Implementing counternarcotics operations threatened some elements financially. In short, this was a graduated, wholesale, transfer of authority from the power brokers to an elected, representative government. What was in it for the power brokers? Why should they go along with the programme? Why should the international community expect them to just give up without a fight? These were the people who fought the Soviets (or sided with them from time to time, like Dostum...) and then the Taliban. It was unrealistic to think that this transition would be smooth and it was misguided to think of the power brokers in solely adversarial terms. There were even some who wanted the power brokers subjected to Bosnia-like war crimes trials, but there was an unreality to these concepts. The power brokers in Afghanistan were the victors in a war against the Taliban and this was not a Bosnian peacekeeping operation. NATO did not run Afghanistan in the way it did Bosnia. The power brokers were a reality and they had to be handled in such a way to avoid another civil war, not antagonized by or threatened with the Western human rights apparatus led by Louise Arbour. And that was the unstated policy of the Canadians in Kabul.⁵⁴

The tools that Hillier and Lacroix had to work with were the same weilded by Leslie and Devlin, and like their predecessors, they used them in combinations to influence decision making as well as to influence discrete events. For example, one had to stop thinking of 3eR22eR solely as an infantry battalion or a manoeuvre unit and think of it as an influence tool. It could be used to pressure Sayyaf. It could bolster the police and reduce crime. It could reduce terrorism in its area of operation in conjunction with other organizations. Its numbers permitted Canadian commanders to be in the positions they held and to claim influence in coalition circles, which translated into Canadian involvement in dispute resolution in Mazar-e Sharif and Konduz, or in establishment of planning relationships and coordination with the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM organizations, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) and CJTF-180.⁵⁵ Because of his superior relations with Canadian commanders, Canadian ambassador Chris Alexander frequently leveraged Canadian Army capacities in his deliberations with others in the capital. All of the activities of the ETT, the ISTAR Company, the All Source Intelligence Centre and so on, were geared to this environment and the restrictions imposed by the DCDS started to seriously chafe on this system.

In line with the Constitutional Loya Jirga, President Karzai's transitional government established criteria for the national and provincial elections, which were tentatively scheduled for June 2004. All parties had to register, and there were conditions. Military, police, and judiciary personnel could not stand for election. Parties based on anti-Islamic principles were not permitted. Parties were not allowed to instigate social, religious, or regional prejudices, nor could they espouse doctrines that threatened individual rights and freedoms. No military wings of the parties were permitted and foreign funding was disallowed. The Constitutional Loya Jirga Secretariat was transformed into the Joint Electoral Monitoring Body (JEMB). Its task was to prepare, organize, conduct, and oversee the elections. The JEMB was to work closely with the UN and draw on its planning capacity where required; it was up and running by the end of February 2004.⁵⁶

The problem was capacity. The JEMB simply did not have enough horsepower. When Hillier learned of this, he pressured the European Union to get more managerial resources.⁵⁷ Informal information exchanges between the Canadians at ISAF and the Americans at CFC-A eventually uncovered another serious problem. There was a UN security plan for the voter registration process but it had not been coordinated with either ISAF or the Americans. The timelines did not match up at all. Another sticking point related to ISAF expansion: how many ISAF troops would there be and where would the elections take place? The UNAMA electoral component was now asking an ISAF liaison officer to help align the timelines. Hillier met with the UNAMA leadership to find a way to get the UN Secretary General to approach NATO for help with elections security. To assist further, ISAF even provided President Karzai with a draft letter to NATO to ask NATO for more support!⁵⁸

The European Union representatives who were involved with building up the elections monitoring capacity then expressed concerns to ISAF. Their people informed them that the Afghan population in general was expecting the presence of international monitors to ensure that the elections would be free and fair. Who would handle their security? And what about the polling sites themselves? The Ministry of the Interior expressed frustration to the Canadian leadership over the lack of a UNAMA voter registration security plan, commenting that the situation was not as good as it was for the Constitutional Loya Jirga.⁵⁹

The situation was further aggravated when five Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) aid workers were killed by insurgents in eastern Afghanistan on 24 February 2004. CARE publicly called out ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM demanding that they concentrate on improving security, that PRTs become involved in security operations as well as coordinate their operations with non-governmental organizations working in the provinces.⁶⁰

Despite becoming the virtual clearinghouse for international community and Afghan Transitional Administration relations on key issues, ISAF was hamstrung. NATO was still wrestling with getting enough personnel to man Kabul International Airport, let alone expand beyond Konduz. By May 2004, the process to get more European members to commit to Afghanistan had failed. A frustrated SACEUR declared that “without these critical requirements being met, expansion beyond Kabul would be difficult and would involve considerable risk to the troops on the ground.... NATO has now undertaken a mission that nations [are] unable or unwilling to resource.”⁶¹ Worse, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the Canadian ambassador, “Afghanistan highlights the inadequacy of our force generation process...we are at great risk of failing to honour commitments we have made.... Our credibility and the future of Afghanistan is on the line.”⁶²

The American commanders in Afghanistan, specifically Lt Gen David Barno, were agitated with the lack of progress on all fronts. As a result, CFC-A moved forward with detailed unilateral planning for Voter Registration and Election security. With the deployment of the 25th Infantry Division to Afghanistan, CJTF-180 now became CJTF-76. The American forces had recently reorganized their three regional commands; each regional command was in charge of the PRTs in the region and the manoeuvre task forces, usually a battalion per region, responsible for conducting operations at the provincial and regional levels. The American planners’ strategies took into account that ISAF could only handle Voter Registration and Election support in Kabul and Kabul province and 40 kilometres surrounding the Konduz PRT. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces would handle everything else, in lieu of any further NATO support.⁶³ Once again, necessity and practicality drove ‘strategic harmonization,’ not a considered, long-term approach.

The need for better international community – Afghan Transitional Administration coordination – was increasingly evident in early 2004. The various ‘security sector reform’ meetings, group of principles meetings, and forums for international community coordination were failing. Situation reports back to Canada from ISAF HQ noted that:

The SSR [security sector reform] meeting held today highlighted a number of COMISAF’s philosophical concerns about the conduct and coordination of ATA/IC activities in Afghanistan. While the discussions were useful and constructive, they were dominated by [International Community] representatives at the expense of contributions from ATA representatives. The meeting also demonstrated the overall lack of coordination between the pillars of SSR and confirmed the need for and validity of the Roadmap for Afghanistan Project.⁶⁴

Similarly, in a group of principles meeting, “the discussions that took place provided clear evidence of the lack of coordination between the key agencies involved in the programmes to rebuild Afghanistan.”⁶⁵ Experiences like this led to deeper Canadian Army involvement in Afghan reconstruction issues in 2005–2006.

Problems with the Power Brokers

Operation GONDOLA, the Canadian support to heavy weapons cantonment, had been chugging along steadily in the background. Roto 1 was much more reluctant to support DDR than Roto 0. The attitude in some quarters was that DDR was a “Leslie show” that used what they believed to be his excess support capacity to conduct DDR. Roto 1 did not think it had any excess capacity so it chose to focus its resources on supporting Canadians first.⁶⁶ In any event, contacts continued to be made with local commanders, and negotiations were conducted between the Ministry of Defence to arrange for the delivery of the systems to the cantonment sites. The process ground to a halt in early March 2004 over 16 Armoured Brigade, a formation located in northern Kabul and associated with Fahim’s Tajiks. Commander ISAF approached Fahim in an effort to get movement on the cantonment process, a move that succeeded.⁶⁷

The issue over 16 Brigade led to deeper analysis at ISAF of future cantonment efforts and the direction of DDR generally. ISAF learned that the Afghan New Beginnings Program, working with the Ministry of Defence, had come up with a cantonment/DDR plan for the rest of Afghanistan. They were having problems staffing the plan and, in any event, President Karzai had not endorsed it. When Hillier met with Karzai, he learned that there were serious concerns about the linkage between cantonment/DDR and the voter registration process.⁶⁸ In effect, dismantling the militias and not having a viable Afghan National Army in place would lead to a security vacuum that the Taliban and others could

and would exploit. Leaving the militias in place left coercive tools in the hands of the power brokers around the country that could be used to influence the election. Cantonment had and continued to have a positive effect on Kabul, but Kabul was not the rest of the country.

At the end of March, a larger meeting was convened which included UN, NATO, Ministry of Defence, Karzai, Fahim, Dostum and General Abdul Rahim Wardak. Dostum was key because of the growing problems in northern Afghanistan, where ISAF was expanding. This meeting revealed that several divergent agendas were becoming problematic. Karzai wanted all the AMFs gone by 2005 and he did not want ethnic balancing in the army; he was annoyed at the lack of progress on DDR planning and was keen to publicly announce progress on DDR in the run-up to the election. The intended audiences were probably the Afghan population and the international community donors, many of whom were pushing for the removal of the “war lords” though others in the non-governmental organization community suspected American pressure related to the upcoming American elections. As it turned out, the concern about a security gap between AMFs and the Afghan National Army came from Wardak, who wanted written assurances that ISAF would fill the void (which of course was not possible given the issues surrounding ISAF expansion). Wardak was now arguing with Afghan New Beginnings and the UN over the numbers of AMF personnel to be disbanded under DDR. Wardak was setting the numbers higher than agreed – 4 000 more than the current number.⁶⁹

What did all of this mean? In effect, the power brokers were doing what Afghans do best: negotiate, stall, negotiate again, hum and haw, and negotiate again until they wear their opponent down and get what they want. This was no different from an average bazaar negotiation, which involves a combination of public drama, entertainment and socializing as a process to reach an agreement that satisfies both parties materially as well as their prestige. Western international community personnel and Western military personnel had a different concept of time and wanted everything done now because it had to fit a timeline or a schedule. That was not the Afghan way. ‘Face’ was important, not the need to meet a Western deadline. Moreover, the power brokers were loath to just walk away from their positions. And why should they?

The constant drip of Operation GONDOLA was in part the Canadian response to this. Throughout March 2004, heavy weapons in Kabul, in this case the National Guard Brigade’s kit, continued to move into the Rish Khvor and Banda Daud cantonment sites, thus reducing the possibility of their use as negotiating tools or coercive tools by the power brokers in the capital. 31st Infantry Division, 11th Air Division, and 216 Air Defence Regiment were next.

Further discussions between ISAF and the UN served to solidify concerns about the cantonment/DDR and Voter Registration and Election processes. The DDR process, when sampled, was heavily weighted to demobilization and not reintegration. To make the numbers

work, militia soldiers were simply being let go and not provided with their reintegration kit, or worse; some commanders were seizing the reintegration supplies for themselves. The prospect of thousands of former AMF troops wandering around aimlessly without jobs was, in the words of the UN representatives, “more dangerous than doing nothing.”⁷⁰

It was evident to those who had served in Kosovo that demobilized soldiers could potentially be recruited by power brokers for their own private security forces which would not be, technically, militias in Afghanistan but could still be used as coercive tools operating in competition with the government. This is exactly what happened later in Kandahar province. In time, the UN would come up with a new programme called Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG).

In any event, the UN representatives pressed ISAF for more support to the voter registration process. The UN explored the possibility of deploying ISAF forces to their central offices throughout the country. They also wanted ISAF and CFC-A to assist with polling site security.⁷¹ The pressure to get ISAF to expand beyond Kabul and Konduz increased and the idea that the PRTs could be used for other purposes, like demobilization and electoral support, started to emerge.

Matters between the power brokers, the UN and the Afghan Transitional Administration seriously deteriorated in May 2004. Karzai’s push to have 40% of the militias demobilized and reintegrated before the elections was not going to be met. The UN pointed the finger at several power brokers’ militias who were stalling or outright refusing to provide lists of personnel to the DDR authorities. The primary culprits were Ismael Khan in Herat, Maj Gen Daud Daud’s 6th Corps in Konduz, and General Atta’s 7th Corps near Mazar-e Sharif. All three, incidentally, were aligned with Fahim, who was the Defence Minister. Rashid Dostum remained above the fray, for the time being, making pious pronouncements about how there should only be one army in Afghanistan (many thought he meant his, not the Afghan National Army). Sayyaf’s forces, now being cantoned in Kabul, stalled on the DDR part too. Hillier concluded that “The credibility of any elections held in the current climate will naturally be held into question. Elections would simply legitimize the current power holder, remove any incentive for further disarmament and leave conditions ripe for future conflict...the slow pace of voter registration also threatens the feasibility of holding free and fair elections.”⁷²

The cantonment of 8th Division stalled. The change of personalities in command of militia forces in Faryab province also threatened a delicate power balance there related to narcotics trafficking and threatened to turn violent. Information then came in that Ismael Khan and Fahim were possibly planning to take out Karzai. It was deemed not credible. Ismael Khan then declared that he would refuse to submit to DDR and one of Atta’s divisional commanders refused to decommission 1st Division unless Dostum’s 53rd Division

was also decommissioned at the same time.⁷³ Factional violence killed six people including police near Mazar-e Sharif. In the midst of this, Karzai's Cabinet passed the Electoral Law on 12 May 2004.

Hillier flew up to Mazar-e Sharif to see what was going on. On that trip, he learned that Balkh province, 35 kilometres to the south, was essentially “an arena” for Dostum's and Atta's forces “to settle an old score” and that there was little that outside forces could do for the time being. The idea of a delegation of international community ambassadors plus the UN special representative was mooted but it would take some time to implement.⁷⁴

By the end of May, the number of power brokers and independent commanders who were resisting the Afghan government on DDR and other matters was increasing. Atta accused the UN of publicly insulting him; he would not cooperate without an apology, which the UN would not give in on. In addition to the problems in Balkh, Mazar-e Sharif, Konduz and Herat, militia commanders in Parwan, Panjshir, and now Kabul province were refusing to cooperate. The situation was critical.⁷⁵

Several things happened more or less simultaneously to temporarily defuse this powder keg. Bismillah Khan approached Hamid Karzai and asked him to consider a more graduated approach to DDR. By the end of May, Karzai made it known that he was leaning in that direction. Second, the American ambassador met with the regional power brokers to find out what, exactly, they wanted and what could be negotiated. He later was able to get Fahim and Sayyaf to agree to produce manning lists, the precursor to DDR but not agreement on DDR itself.⁷⁶

Word emerged that Karzai and the power brokers made some sort of power-sharing deal, but details were sketchy. One version had Karzai telling the power brokers they could not participate in the elections if they were in control of non-DDR'd formations, while the other version was that he completely caved in and the graduated approach was just a smokescreen.⁷⁷ In neither version was there any movement on DDR in the belt of militia forces just outside Kabul, nor was there any connection made to the increased level of violence in the northwest, nor was there any linkage made to the elections process.

Operation HERMES and Voter Registration and Election Operations

ISAF monitored events closely and concluded that the new DDR arrangements probably would not work over the long term. Every indicator told ISAF that the population did not want to be pressured by regional power brokers; they wanted elections, and they wanted those elections to be conducted in a non-coercive atmosphere run by the international community. The Americans were in the process of re-jigging their countrywide approach to handle Voter Registration and Election operations. Given all of the issues related to power brokers, demobilization and the elections, what could ISAF do to positively contribute to the situation?

There were several considerations. Cantonment was proceeding in the city of Kabul itself, but heavy weapons surveys of the militia formations just outside the capital were going slowly because of power broker reticence. Second, the ISAF area of operations was not fully patrolled, particularly the rural parts of Kabul province, which surrounded the city. Numerous nooks and crannies were observed in the hills, places where people could hide things discreetly, and terrain anomalies where an artificial boundary line on a map left unpatrolled gaps between ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. There were isolated population groups (potential registered voters or insurgents!) who may not even have known about an upcoming election. Then, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM virtually ignored the adjacent provinces whose natural terrain features funneled into Kabul–Wardak, Parwan, Kapisa, Logar and Panjshir because of its focus on the border provinces in Regional Command (East) as combating cross-border insurgents was the order of the day. With the killings of elections personnel elsewhere, the idea of assisting with their security as they went about their tasks in these areas gained credence at KMNB. The JEMB established its Central Region: it consisted of those same provinces. Could some synergy be found? BGen Lacroix wanted to “show the bad guys that ISAF wasn’t restricted by lines on a map.”⁷⁸ (See Figure 5-2)

One particular area of concern was Koh-e Safi. This district lay on the eastern edge of the ISAF area of operations, but it was sandwiched between a mountain range to the west and the artificial area of operations line, which lay to the east; the mountains cut the area off from Kabul but the area wasn’t really part of Kapisa province or Parwan province. It was a natural staging area for insurgents who wanted to attack Bagram and Kabul. KMNB mounted Operation BAFFIN in late April 2004 to poke around and see what was going on. The recce determined that there was no enemy activity visible but there was a neglected population centre there.⁷⁹

Operation HERMES evolved from this thinking. The planners looked at the JEMB timeline and built HERMES to support it:⁸⁰

- **Stage I** Registration 1 May until 30 June 2004.
Target: 5 800 sites and 10 million eligible voters
- **Stage II** Challenge and Campaign period 1 July–11 September 2004.
Campaigning for Presidential and Wolesi Jirga elections.
- **Stage III** Polling/Elections, possibly September 2004.
Voting conducted at sites and then transported to Kabul for counting.
- **Stage IV** Run-off elections

FIGURE 5-2:
Operation HERMES – Voter Registration
and Election Operations Areas,
2004

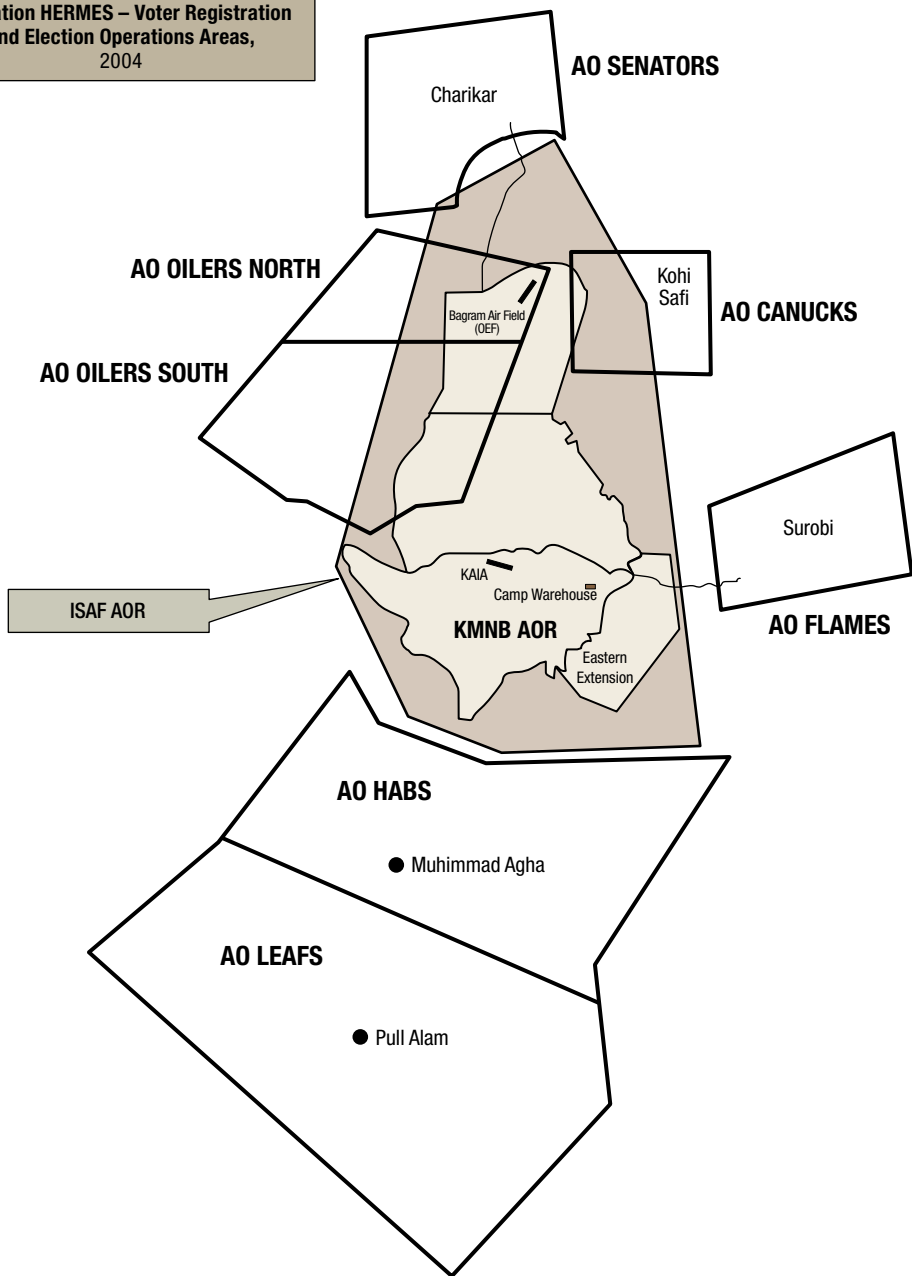


Figure 5-2: Operation HERMES – Voter Registration and Election Operations Areas, 2004

ISAF priorities were to have Kabul Multinational Brigade support heavy weapons cantonment and DDR in Kabul and Konduz, then conduct ‘out of area’ operations in the Central Region provinces. All operations were to focus on deterrence and reassurance through shows of force and presence operations in as visible a fashion as possible. This included information operations and logistics support as much as possible to the JEMB itself.⁸¹

KMNB’s concept of operations for Operation HERMES had four phases per targeted area. First, the Brigade G-9 and a liaison officer from the executing unit would deploy to the area and meet with the local elders. They would be invited to Camp Warehouse to meet with Commander KMNB. Second, an initial recce consisting of a recce platoon, a forward observation officer/forward air controller party, plus medical, intelligence, CIMIC and psychological operations personnel would move in and assess the security situation. Commander KMNB would then meet local elders again. A third phase, follow-on operations, was not fully defined; it was to “shape the battlespace for subsequent operations,” that is, elections operations. Phase four, subsequent operations, might include the deployment of CIMIC, information operations and medical aid as required. Recce Squadron or 3eR22eR companies would assure protection for all deployments. Importantly, KMNB planners insisted that poppy eradication be completely deconflicted with Operation HERMES so the two were not seen to be linked.⁸² ISAF also told the JEMB it would handle any evacuation of JEMB personnel from the ops boxes whether due to medical emergency or threat.

The Operation HERMES operating areas were named after hockey teams. HABS and LEAFS were Logar province to the south, while OILERS and CANUCKS were to the north: CANUCKS was Koh-e Safi district. OILERS had been a main battle area between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban between Bagram and Kabul. Area of operation FLAMES was the Sarobi district, which boasted a hydroelectric dam and the highway to the Khyber Pass.

Hillier approved the plan; the initial focus would be on Koh-e Safi, then Sarobi. Voter Registration and Election still had to be done in Charikar and in Central Military Area West, so these areas were added as well (probably to get the 3eR22eR Battalion Group more fully engaged). If the elections board requested assistance in any of the operations boxes, a “package” would be sent in to set the conditions for their operations as required.⁸³

Not surprisingly, there were problems in getting the CDS’s authorization for Operation HERMES. Rather than give blanket approval for the operation, the CDS had to give his approval each time a Canadian unit deployed to an operations box. This meant that KMNB had to ask the CDS through the National Command Element and then the DCDS every time it deployed – initial recce, follow-on operations, and subsequent operations – for each operations box. The NCE had to submit, with each situation report, a matrix for each component of Operation HERMES to the DCDS as it unfolded. The CDS then had to

approve each deployment. Needless to say, this slowed down Operation HERMES at a time when a visible presence was required throughout the edges of the Kabul area of operations.

There were also problems getting money for CIMIC support to Operation HERMES. This was the “fleeting nature” of operations that ISAF critics of CIDA’s “heavy bureaucracy” referred to previously. Nipa Bannerjee from CIDA did what she could at the Kabul end but in time, BGen Lacroix shifted his efforts when he learned that the American training establishment, TF Phoenix, had a substantial amount of money available through its Commanders Emergency Response Programme (CERP) money. The TF Phoenix commander, who saw the constraints placed on KMNB, offered \$1 million to support CIMIC projects. Note that if Canada had not been part of Afghan National Army training with an ETT and had not supported the Americans by hosting their embedded trainers at Camp Julien, KMNB would probably not have been offered these resources. BGen Lacroix wanted to use 75% of the money for Operation HERMES and then pass the rest on to support the Kabul Mayor’s projects.⁸⁴

By early June, teams of Canadians from KMNB, Recce Squadron, R Battery, and 3eR22eR were deploying progressively into the Operation HERMES operation boxes while the JEMB voter registration teams came in behind them and went about their tasks. This was a refreshing change of pace for the troops; they had essentially been restricted to the confines of the West Kabul police districts, training police and mounting framework patrols. No resistance was encountered throughout June in any of the operation boxes and no violence was directed against the JEMB teams while they were protected by Canadian ISAF troops. The situation was different over in Nangarhar province, however. A bomb attack against a JEMB bus killed two and wounded several. These people were evacuated by Turkish UH-60 to the Role 3 hospital at Camp Warehouse.⁸⁵

Operation HERMES ultimately allowed the Afghan Transitional Administration to expand its area of influence, albeit temporarily, and contribute toward a positive result in the Voter Registration and Election process. Its deterrence value is more difficult to measure, but if any of the power brokers, the commanders of the AMFs or the insurgents were watching, they would have seen mobile teams going where they wanted, when they wanted, building up support for the government in population groupings, in areas not traditionally controlled by the power brokers.⁸⁶

The ISAF criteria for determining the effectiveness of the Voter Registration and Election process was based on a number of metrics. These included the number of people who registered to vote, their gender, the number of operational voter registration sites and their location. The shift in ISAF and CFC-A operations to support the JEMB in the May-June period most likely had a contributory effect. For example, in early May 2004, 2.3 million people registered with 37 000 people registering daily at 408 sites. This was

considered sluggish.⁸⁷ UNAMA and the JEMB were hampered by the lack of transportation and communications, especially in the outlying areas. One month later, with ISAF and CFC-A support, 3 million were registered at 800 sites. Prior to this, the number of female registered voters was 50% of the number of people registering, in a numerically male-dominated society. That number dropped to 35%, an indicator that there was more buy-in to the process from the male population throughout the country.⁸⁸ By the end of June, the JEMB told ISAF that “the unrest and security concerns are not directly threatening the VRE process. Voter registration is now in a satisfactory state of development and attaining the unofficial target of 5.2 million registered voters” out of an estimated 10 million possible registered voters.⁸⁹ And the numbers continued to grow.

Canadian Contingent Operations

The Canadian contingent, particularly the NSE, continued with Operation GONDOLA; one of its more important cantonments was 11 Air Defence Regiment and 216 Air Defence Regiment operations. These units possessed substantial numbers of SA-13 and SA-7 launchers, as well as anti-aircraft artillery. Any one system was a threat to the vital ISAF air bridge at Kabul International Airport, so these items became a priority once they were discovered during surveys. Their cantonment was no issue and it was completed in April.⁹⁰

As 3eR22eR Battalion Group developed contacts with the police and the population through training and CIMIC activities, more and more information came in from a variety of sources about weapons caches west of Kabul. Their locations varied but, for the most part, they lay either just beyond the area of operations boundary or in immediately adjacent provinces like Wardak and Logar. In a number of cases, timely permission was not given by DCDS, so KMNB used other countries to carry out the location and destruction missions. One of these operations bagged 40 122mm rockets that had been hidden away on the boundary of Paghman district and Wardak province. LCol Roy was finally able to get permission for Operation DAMOCLES I and II, a cache destruction operation in Wardak. This operation successfully destroyed a substantial cache including a Soviet fuel air munition.⁹¹

ISTAR Company, meanwhile, continued with its framework surveillance and patrol tasks across the multinational brigade area of operations. The Slovenian light reconnaissance unit joined them on Operation OLYMPUS, the establishment of observation posts over-watching downtown Kabul.⁹²

Directed operations also continued at a heightened pace. Operation ULYSSES, targeting an explosives facilitator, was ‘blown’ over an operational security issue and had to be re-cocked by KMNB. When it was finally executed as Operation PENELOPE, 200 kilograms of explosives were seized and 36 people detained by 3eR22eR and the National Directorate of Security.

A concurrent operation, SCHILLER, was a German/French/Afghan Ministry of Interior job targeting those involved with the German bus bombing in 2003. It bagged the commander in charge of the cell that mounted the attack. All of these operations had Canadian participation either as cordon or sensitive site exploitation or in the provision of intelligence. Another operation conducted by another coalition partner bagged the HiG provincial commander in Wardak that had ties to attacks on Canadians.⁹³ This one was different: Canadians should have been able to, and more importantly, been seen to be able to exact payback for attacks on Canadians. In this case, appearances were and remained important. Having another country do Canada's 'night work' did not contribute to Canada's image within coalition circles or with the enemy, especially when combined with all of the other restrictions regarding Operation HERMES and directed operations.

Then there was Operation HALLE. The Kabul Chief of Police had serious problems with criminal activity in – surprise – PD 5 and PD 14. His own police were suspect and, given the relationship between local police, the Sayyaf organization, and 717th Protection Regiment manning the KEPs, he requested ISAF assistance to 'deter' criminal activity. All of the ISTAR Company surveillance resources were applied, and then the bulk of 3eR22eR swept down through the districts *en masse* on 1 June 2004. Dutch AH-64s hovered and flew back and forth with the TUAV system providing over-watch as the Van Doos LAVs dropped off infantry to conduct snap vehicle checkpoints and neighbourhood framework patrols. Kabul City Police, some from other districts, joined PD 5 and PD 14 police for 'joint patrols.' Saturating the two districts sent a message not only to street criminals but the power brokers in that part of the city. The Kabul Chief of Police was ecstatic with Operation HALLE, and ASIC coverage confirmed its success: it was a high point of battalion group/police cooperation and only reinforced the positive working relationships that had been painstakingly built up.⁹⁴

There were also 'unknowns' in the system conducting direct action operations in the Canadian area of operation. Three operations were mounted in June 2004, without coordination with KMNB, including one in PD 5. On one of these operations, the assaulting force called KMNB on a cell phone and requested EOD support. This was odd, but KMNB responded with the appropriate resources. As it turned out, there was a freelance American group called "Task Force Saber 7" running their own operations in Afghanistan. These involved detaining and interrogating Afghans thought to be involved in terrorism. Led by Keith "Jack" Idema, a man who claimed to be a former special forces soldier, this group was looking for Osama bin Laden ostensibly in order to win the multi-million dollar bounty on him. This 'unit' posed as U.S. special forces personnel. Idema tried to provide the Canadian contingent with alleged information on the terrorist cell that mounted the 27 January attack but he was eventually arrested and jailed by Afghan authorities.⁹⁵

A Growing Insurgency

It is not surprising that ISAF's attention was directed at the problems in northern Afghanistan and around Kabul – that was its area of operations after all until the issue of an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM/ISAF merger was sorted out. That said, ISAF was in a position to observe the early growth of the Taliban insurgency and some of the factors that fuelled it. The idea that NATO ISAF would progressively assume control of some of the existing CFC-A regional commands was already in play in late 2003. By early 2004 the concept of a counter-clockwise progression, from north to west, to south to east, was fleshed out and up for discussion. At the same time, Canada was looking at PRT options and looking for places that would have the greatest strategic effect. At a meeting in late January 2004 between CFC-A, ISAF, and members of the international community, Canadian ambassador Chris Alexander expressed serious concern about the counter-clockwise progression plan. In his travels to the south, he noted there was a growing sense among the Pashtuns that saw the Northern Alliance members, all non-Pashtuns, getting their piece of the action.⁹⁶ It was possible that a sense of “Pashtun alienation” (a phrase that emerged during diplomatic discourse) could be a future source of problems, similar to the Northern Alliance power brokers with their reticence games over DDR or worse, insurgency like the Taliban. The Taliban might even be welcomed back under such circumstances.

One potential solution, suggested by Ambassador Alexander, was to break up the counter-clockwise progression and insert an ISAF PRT right into Kandahar so that reconstruction aid could be ‘jump-started’ in that critical province and city to stave off Pashtun alienation.⁹⁷ This was a way station in the Canadian journey from Kabul to Kandahar. The idea that there were growing problems with the Pashtuns in early 2004 was shunted to the side by the issues with the northerners, however. By May 2004, the first tranche of voter registration data coming in from the south indicated things were not good: 75% of the voters registered were from the north, with only 25% from the south.⁹⁸ Only then did some members of the international community sit up and take notice.

Those people missed what was going on right under their noses in Kabul. A whole “front” of the war was being fought in the mosques and between religious authorities throughout Afghanistan. In May 2004, ISAF and CFC-A analysts noted that there was a dramatic increase in reports of anti-western speeches in the mosques around Kabul. Speakers from Pakistan were being brought in to talk regularly. As Commander ISAF correctly put it, “In a society that lacks television and other mass media channels, Mullahs are important and influential. . . it is imperative to monitor the Mullah situation as continued anti-western speeches could have a destabilizing effect on the security situation.”⁹⁹ ISAF never developed a coherent approach to religious engagement – not by 2011 and certainly not in 2004.

The coalition was lucky to have the National Ulema ‘in support’, as it were. The National Ulema was the senior Islamic religious body in Afghanistan and it intersected with the judicial system at all levels. After due consideration of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, the National Ulema produced a public declaration of support for the Afghan government on 22 May 2004. The Ulema supported women’s rights, it condemned drug trafficking, and strongly supported free elections.¹⁰⁰ When the Ulema publicly supported Karzai against the regional power brokers in July 2004, some in ISAF understood the importance of the event but most did not.¹⁰¹ Through this was a major vote of confidence from the religious community, neither ISAF nor the international community fully recognized or fully exploited its importance.

That said, the mosque speech campaign was clearly an organized information operation conducted by someone on the other side of the Durand Line. It was not spontaneous, but it was also feeding on something. By June 2004, voter registration teams in the Pashtun south and east were getting attacked – and in the northern Pashtun enclave of Konduz.¹⁰² As for guerrilla operations, the main problem areas were Khost, Oruzgan, and Zabul provinces. There were constant shootings, kidnappings, and other outrages directed against aid workers and voter registration personnel. On 16 June 2004, two gunmen on a motorcycle assassinated the Director of Refugees in Kandahar province.

Cutting across all of this was the stand up by the British and U.S. State Department of the Afghan Central Poppy Eradication Force, a Ministry of the Interior organization. The CPEF rollout was supposed to be in Wardak province. Reports from local people in Wardak, once the force started operating, were not good. The combined effects of the DDR programme on units in Wardak and the effects of poppy eradication generated a high level of agitation among the Pashtun population in Wardak who saw themselves as being unfairly targeted by the government and its supporters. This resulted in violence directed against police and the Central Poppy Eradication Force. General Wardak withdrew the eradication force and plans were put in place to send it to a non-Pashtun area so that the government could be seen to be “fair.”¹⁰³

The conditions for a Pashtun-based insurgency were starting to develop and precursor situations to what would later be encountered in southern Afghanistan existed in 2004. A religious dimension to the development of the country was being missed. Poppy eradication and lack of balanced approach to reconstruction were generating grievances within part of the population. A large percentage of a crucial part of the population was not participating in voter registration. These were some of the indicators. General Wardak noted in a July 2004 briefing that:

The coalition’s image of invincibility firmly established in 2001, was wearing off as the Taliban achieved small successes. This raises the issue of the point in time that those you have come to help begin to see you as part of the problem. This analysis is also pertinent for ISAF.¹⁰⁴

Few could have predicted the violent events of 2006 at this time but the warning signs were emerging.

Operation DIANA and the Embedded Training Team

Back in April 2004, Col Tremblay and his staff were concerned about the status of the ETT. At this point, the ETT was working with 4th Kandak, and 13 of the 15 kandaks that were under training by TF Phoenix had already deployed outside Kabul in one way or another. Canadian policy did not allow the Canadian ETT to deploy. Col Tremblay saw that there were increasing problems with this decision:

Removal of the CA ETT from its Kandak adds a further complicating factor at a difficult juncture for the unit. Given that the relationship between the CA ETT members and the Kandak has taken time to develop, the introduction of a different nation's ETT element may affect that Kandak's confidence and lead to reduced efficiency.¹⁰⁵

Canadian interests were a serious factor. Tremblay anticipated that ISAF and OEF were going to merge at some point and, if that occurred the excuse that the Canadian ETT was ISAF and therefore limited to Kabul would drop away. In his and others' view, this mission was a high profile task for Canada and had great saliency with allies, Canada was exposed to a greater variety of Afghan officials, it was media-positive and a valuable experience for Canadian soldiers. Prophetically, Col Tremblay noted that "If the restrictions cannot be lifted, than the CA ETT must seek another task since it will be of little use."¹⁰⁶

Col Tremblay then had a pointed meeting with the Americans at TF Phoenix. The American command, CFC-A, was going to use all Afghan National Army resources as part of its Voter Registration and Election operations plan, and therefore the ETTs had to deploy with them. 4th Kandak was scheduled for Mazar-e Sharif. What was Canada going to do? Col Tremblay put in the request for Operation DIANA, the anticipated Canadian ETT deployment to Mazar-e Sharif. He emphasized that the threat was medium, not high, that there was factional fighting, not terrorism, and that the kandak would be doing framework patrolling. "Recent movements of Afghan National Army troops by the Afghan Ministry of Defence has returned the region to a reasonable level of stability" in the past and all of the militia commanders knew that the kandak was supported by the Americans and would be apprehensive about taking it on. There was no immediate reply.



Photo Credit: Author

Conceived in 2003 and finally manned in 2004, the Canadian Army contributed a portion of its deployed forces towards the Afghan National Army Design Team and later an Embedded Training Team with the Afghan National Army. This was the start of a 15-year commitment to assisting the Afghan National Army in its professionalization.

The deteriorating situation in Balkh, Herat, and Konduz provinces increasingly drew ISAF's attention away from Kabul. The Ministry of Defence planned to deploy an Afghan National Army kandak from 1st Brigade to Mazar-e Sharif as part of President Karzai's move to remind the antagonists in Balkh that there was a central government in place. The presence of the Afghan National Army in the provincial capital along with the presence of the new British-led PRT would, in theory, have a calming effect on the situation. 4th Kandak was selected – the kandak with the Canadian ETT. The Canadian National Command Element worked on the plan to support the ETT if it deployed to Mazar-e Sharif. Another request went to the DCDS in Ottawa for approval. There was no positive reply, and there would not be even a negative one until 1 August 2004, months after the initial warning that Canada might be needed.¹⁰⁷

Indeed, some were not in favour of these and similar deployments. When the task force staff looked at the risk involved in deploying the ETT, those who were opposed argued that the medical evacuation requirements could not be met. Furthermore, the

NDHQ restrictions on the number of flying hours for the Canadian CC-130 transports based at Camp Mirage meant that someone else's airlift would have to be used and the reliability of such an airlift was questionable. TF KABUL was at odds with LGen Hillier from a philosophical perspective. Some in TF KABUL saw LGen Hillier as exceeding the brief he had been given by the CDS and believed that Hillier was angling to make the Canadian contingent ISAF's "fire brigade" for the whole country. Some even disagreed with ambassador Chris Alexander's leveraging of TF KABUL in the larger strategic game in Kabul and thought that Canada should play as limited a role as possible.¹⁰⁸

On 4 July 2004, 400 militia soldiers from Atta's 7 Corps replaced the police checkpoints throughout Mazar-e Sharif and ejected the police from their headquarters. The Chief of Police for Balkh province was barricaded in his home. Over in Herat, Ismael Khan dismissed the provincial Chief of Security, who was recently appointed by the Ministry of the Interior in Kabul. Ismael Khan's bodyguards forcibly removed the staffers and officers from the National Directorate of Security office in Herat. Though some ISAF analysts did not see the two events as connected, they were serious simultaneous challenges to the Afghan Transitional Administration.¹⁰⁹

The situation in Mazar-e Sharif calmed down through negotiation. The new Chief of Police, a Pashtun from Kandahar, as it turned out, was accused of narcotics activity and Atta's people wanted him out. Whether he was a competitor or not was unclear. The situation was still volatile. The Canadian ETT and the NCE repeated the request for authorization to deploy with their kandak to Mazar-e Sharif. The mission was to work with the kandak in establishing framework operations like vital point security, patrolling, and vehicle checkpoints in the city. The request was not approved.¹¹⁰ One must ask the question: if the kandak with Canadian embedded trainers had deployed earlier, would the Balkh coup have taken place at all?

Over in Herat, the situation was different – and worse.¹¹¹ Amanullah Khan Zadran, a regional militia commander and long-time rival of Ismael Khan, mobilized his forces in Shindand and started to move on Herat. It was like Atta versus Dostum all over again just in a different location. The Ministry of Defence working with TF Phoenix worked up a Karzai-endorsed plan to deploy 1st Brigade to Shindand on nine C-130s. The sudden arrival of Afghan National Army troops, not militia forces, was gauged to produce a calming effect on the situation. Once again, the Canadian ETT was prohibited by Ottawa from accompanying its kandak to Herat.¹¹² 1 500 troops from 1st Brigade flew in late August 2004 and the two Khans' forces stopped fighting. This bought time for Karzai to work on his relationship with Ismael Khan, who was eventually "promoted" to a position in Kabul and removed from the situation later that fall.¹¹³

Canada had an opportunity to play a positive role in these critical events and improve Canada's credibility and leverage through the deployment of 20 personnel – and chose not to on two occasions because of a risk-averse outlook. Canada's credibility with the Afghan National Army was damaged, especially with the troops that were being trained by the Canadian ETT: the ETT's morale suffered as a result.¹¹⁴ The long delay did not endear the Canadian ETT contingent with TF Phoenix and its chain of command either, who then had to backfill the gap with their own scarce resources.

The reticence of Ottawa to fully support ETT operations when all was said and done struck the task force leadership as incongruous with Canadian objectives in Kabul:

It is felt that ISAF's future exit strategy will depend on the handing over of security to the Afghans themselves. Kabul City Police, the National Directorate of Security, and the Afghan National Army organizations will have to take over Kabul security in order to permit ISAF to put in place its PRT plan.¹¹⁵

Having a capable and confident Afghan National Army was part of this and the provincial operations contributed to that end-state. Indeed, given the problems NATO was having finding 500 people to man Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, one would have thought more Canadian effort would have been expended at this time, increasing Canada's training capacity vis-à-vis the Afghan National Army and the ETTs. There is a level of irony here given Canada's later emphasis on Operational Mentor and Liaison Team operations and the complete shift of the Canadian Army mission to army and police training eight years later in 2011.

Another Coup d'État?

The ISAF units in Kabul continued with their framework operations and continued to disrupt HiG, Al Qaeda and Taliban cells on a weekly basis. Operation GONDOLA was 60% complete. This was enough to put a serious dent in the power broker's military capacities to threaten the democratic process in the city but there were still some problem commanders and units. 717th Protection Regiment, for example, was implicated in narcotics trafficking and was affiliated with Fahim. When the United Kingdom-led counter-narcotics police confronted the commander of the regiment after discovering 42 kilograms of opium in his vehicle at a checkpoint, the general in charge of counter-narcotics police had his nose broken in a scrap between the two forces. Not surprisingly, 717th Protection Regiment was also DDR-resistant. ISTAR resources were allocated to keep an eye on this formation.¹¹⁶

In the waning days of Roto 1, BGen Jocelyn Lacroix attended a dinner where several Afghan generals were present. Hamid Karzai was in the process of moving Fahim out of the Ministry of Defence and into a new Vice President position. Lacroix informally learned that there were concerns at the Ministry of Defence that Tajik AMFs might react badly to the move.

One week later, information came in from the ISTAR organization that there were unusual movements at 717th Protection Regiment. This was upgraded to a possible mobilization of 717th Protection Regiment, which was positioned near the Ministry of the Interior, and had personnel known to be involved in narcotics trafficking connected to Fahim. ISAF forces were the only ones stationed between 717th Regiment's base and the Presidential Palace. BGen Lacroix decided to deploy KMNB elements to protect the Ministry of the Interior headquarters as a precautionary move. Maj Andrew Zdunich's Recce Squadron, supported by Spanish combat engineers, moved discreetly to the headquarters while KMNB HQ spun up Contingency Plans BASTION and BRITTANY with the American CJTF-76. American special forces discreetly moved into the Presidential Palace, while ISAF forces patrolled outside and the Dutch AH-64s orbited downtown. Recce Squadron and the TUAV were instructed to keep an eye on the 717th compound. The AH-64s were told to destroy any armoured vehicle moving through the gate with a Hellfire missile. This would block the gate and buy time to contact the 717th regimental commander – or whoever was controlling him – and get the regiment to back down. Fortunately, none of the tanks proceeded to deploy outside the compound once they saw the orbiting attack helicopters and the tension receded.¹¹⁷

Extending Operation ATHENA in Kabul: October 2003-August 2004

As we will recall back in early 2003, Canada accepted ISAF command and agreed to maintain its contributions until August 2004. It was NATO's responsibility to take over ISAF with a non-national NATO headquarters after that. Canada eventually maintained a presence with ISAF in Kabul for nearly a year and a half before agreeing to relinquish it. Why was this the case? Canada did not want to remain in Kabul, wanted NATO and its members to accept greater responsibility, and looked toward a PRT commitment elsewhere as an exit strategy. In October 2003, the Minister, the CDS and Deputy Minister re-examined the various commitments and options. A regional 'package' of a Canadian ship to support a U.S. Navy carrier battle group and some commitment in Afghanistan was seen to be the best Canadian contribution. The preferred Afghanistan component of that contribution, after the drawdown of the forces in Kabul, consisted of the ETT and Canadian staff at CJTF-180 (later CJTF-76), "U.S. requests for other support to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM" (anodyne language for special operations forces),

and the Operation ACCIUS commitment to UNAMA to support the demobilization process. Contributing to the UN mission in Iraq was another possibility. As for PRTs in Afghanistan, there was “Pressure for countries to support this U.S. initiative in regional centres throughout Afghanistan. Significant security, medical, and logistics concerns have to be addressed before a CF-led PRT could be foreseen.” The situation in Kabul was still volatile and the Canadian leadership had an inkling that extending beyond August 2004 was another possibility.¹¹⁸

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction in Canadian circles regarding NATO’s inability to generate forces to replace the Canadian contingent. From October to November 2003, there was no movement whatsoever. The CDS wrote SACEUR, General James Jones, to remind him that Canada would withdraw in August 2004, but Canada was also examining “residual capabilities.” General Henault reminded General Jones that “NATO nations must continue to rise to the task of generating the forces necessary for mission success, especially if ISAF is to assume greater responsibilities outside of Kabul.”¹¹⁹ Unstated but implied was the question: could a Canadian ‘residual capability’ act as a catalyst for the process?

The high-level ISAF Strategic Coordination Group and a Canadian interdepartmental group met in December 2003 to plot a way forward. Pressure from Commander ISAF-in-waiting, LGen Rick Hillier, to get a Canadian posture articulated sooner rather than later, drove the discussion. DFAIT suggested having Canada take over Kabul airport, while other options like a PRT and extending the existing commitment were debated. National Defence dug in its heels on extension at current levels and was not supportable given the manpower situation and emphasized the need for an 18-month strategic pause. The Kabul airport option had not been examined from an operational perspective, but unstated in the meeting was that it would not be salient in the Afghanistan coalition environment. Many participants seemed to know but did not openly state that the PRT option looked good – except CIDA. The CIDA representative implied that CIDA needed a 10-year “policy horizon” before it could say or do anything related to a PRT, and “an approved policy statement” was needed. DFAIT representatives chimed in and said that they needed a “five-year horizon.” The CF and DND representatives replied that the PRT option was not specifically a military initiative “but one which is developed to bring necessary Government of Canada assets to bear in a clearly mandated manner to address a specific need in a specific geographical location. PRT is not a DND option but a Government of Canada strategic policy statement.” Translation: National Defence and the Canadian Forces were not going to go out on a limb on PRTs as an exit strategy unless CIDA and DFAIT joined them on it. So a PRT as an exit strategy or solution for the ISAF Kabul problem was not on the table unless the elected government understood and accepted that commitment, with all of its implications.¹²⁰

NATO finally replied to the CDS early in January 2004. SACEUR's planners were interested in "residual capabilities":

Our priority would be to see your HUMINT and if at all possible, your ISTAR capability being retained. The knowledge and personal contacts developed by your intelligence community have been built up over time and will continue to increase in value. Although modest in number, it will be difficult to replace this key capability in intelligence-driven operations.

This was very interesting. NATO planners valued the combined Recce Squadron/HUMINT/ASIC capabilities more than an infantry battle group. From a Canadian perspective, however, those capabilities were essentially "enablers" and not enough to "buy" saliency in the coalition. NATO wanted to leverage Canadian capability, but what would Canada receive in return? That was not clear. SACEUR was told in early February that the Government of Canada would examine the "residual capabilities."¹²¹

Pressure was also building from within the Army. The planning and preparation process to either maintain or withdraw a force could not be grown overnight. Most policy makers were unable to grasp the long lead times needed to deploy or remove equipment, establish or disestablish infrastructure. The Canadian Army was legally unable to just lock the doors and walk away from overseas infrastructure, mostly because of Canadian environmental legislation. If the existing force was going to be replaced, its replacements needed direction now, in January 2004, not in August. The pressure was so great that the CDS sent an unprecedented forces-wide message explaining the timelines and the decision-making process he had to go through before he could release a warning order for Roto 2. On 9 February, the issue had to be briefed at the Cabinet Operations Committee. On 10 February, the "3 D Ministers" (DND, DFAIT, CIDA) had to make a presentation to the Global Affairs Cabinet Committee that was chaired by the Prime Minister. Then NATO would release its Statement of Requirements for ISAF on 13 February. Things might change. The plan was to have Cabinet sign a memo on the future force structure and commitment. On 24 February, the Global Affairs Committee would consider what Canada would contribute to the NATO Statement of Requirements. That decision would be briefed to NATO on 5 March at a Force Generation Conference. If all went smoothly, of course.¹²²

NATO ramped up the pressure. The NATO Secretary General wrote to the Minister of National Defence, explaining that the current shortfall was Kabul airport manning but the future issue was that ISAF needed people beyond that. Notably, he pointed out that "As ISAF's expansion is based on the concept of additional PRTs, I also take this opportunity to urge those of you who are considering the deployment of PRTs to accelerate that process."¹²³

By March 2004, little was accomplished. The Kabul airport manning issue (it was only manned at 65%), and now the need for a Role 2 hospital, were unaddressed. If Canada pulled out, there would be no Target Acquisition Radar capability, no electronic warfare/SIGINT capability, and the Military Police Company would be undermanned. There would be a gap in UAV coverage, and the force would be short a battle group. NATO ISAF was now scheduled to assume control of five more PRTs in northern Afghanistan, an area that was now demonstrably getting worse and needed attention.

The idea that Eurocorps, a non-NATO formation, might take over as the NATO ISAF HQ in Kabul and the Franco-German Brigade might assume control of KMNB emerged sometime in March 2004. Another plan to have a British headquarters take over KMNB under the Eurocorps was scotched by the French; this apparent solution was gathering momentum by the spring of 2004.¹²⁴

By May 2004, Canada was leaning in the direction of maintaining forces in Kabul beyond August and eventually announced that Recce Squadron would stay. There were several factors involved, but the driver appears to have been the problems of catalyzing the voter registration process in the spring and the centrality of the elections in the future stability of the country (that is, Afghanistan, not Canada). There was also pressure from a variety of quarters to keep the battalion and the other capabilities. NATO was one, but both the British and the Americans approached Canada and asked Canada to delay withdrawal. This was “driven by concerns over the precarious security situation in the Afghan countryside (Kabul is relatively secure) in the lead-up to the elections now scheduled for September...”¹²⁵

British Prime Minister Tony Blair even wrote Prime Minister Paul Martin. He welcomed Canada’s decision to keep forces in Kabul for the 2004 elections and praised the Canadian soldiers: “I pay tribute to their achievements.” Blair encouraged Canada to take on a PRT as well as “It would be a further demonstration of Canada’s continuing commitment our shared goals of regeneration in Afghanistan.”¹²⁶

Keeping the same commitment level in ISAF was out of the question, however, according to Canadian Forces planners. Even if Canada kept a battalion in Kabul, it could not deploy outside Kabul because it lacked helicopters. There would be “adverse effects on the Canadian Forces programme to retrain and re-equip for future operations.” The operations tempo was so high that Canada needed 12 to 18 months before it could mount the same level of commitment. The Canadian Army was still committed to the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia and had forces in Haiti. The attitude in the Canadian bureaucracy was one of frustration – Canada, many planners believed, had committed more than its share to Afghanistan and others were not doing so.¹²⁷

As for a Canadian PRT, Cabinet asked for a recommendation. The interdepartmental policy group agreed that “Given the security situation in Afghanistan and the heavy investment Canada has already made, there is a logic to Canada assuming responsibility for a PRT” – but not until August 2005.¹²⁸ Operation ATHENA Roto 2 was a “go.” Canada would remain in Kabul with a “residual capability.”

ENDNOTES

1. HQ KMNB SITREP (1 January 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (1 January 2004); HQ KMNB SITREP (2 January 2004).
2. HQ KMNB SITREP (16 January 2004).
3. HQ KMNB SITREP (1 January 2004).
4. NCE SITREP (7 January 2004).
5. HQ KMNB SITREP (14 January 2004) (15 January 2004) (18 January 2004).
6. HQ KMNB SITREP (15 January 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (15 January 2004); NCE SITREP (17 January 2004).
7. Message to DCDS, “Op TSUNAMI” (21 January 2004).
8. HQ KMNB SITREP (27 January 2004).
9. NCE, “Special Assessment SIED 27 January 2004” (27 January 2004); “Board of Inquiry-Kabul Suicide Bomber” (12 March 2004).
10. Ibid.
11. HQ KMNB SITREP (27 January 2004); Interview with MGen Jocelyn Lacroix (Ottawa, 15 March 2010).
12. Leslie interview.
13. NCE, KMNB and HQ ISAF SITREPS (27 January 2004) (28 January 2004) (29 January 2004) (1 February 2004).
14. KMNB SITREP (6 February 2004).
15. Interview with Major David Warnke, Kandahar (8 February 2009).
16. “J3 Engineer Visit to TFK-10-16 January 2004-Comments for DCDS” (24 February 2004).
17. According to Colonel Sylvain Sirois, the decision to cut CF support to countrywide EOD in Canada and the subsequent blending of cultures between engineers and ammo techs to save money in the early 1990s had a deleterious effect. Sirois telephone interview (11 January 2011).
18. Message, “Implementation Order: CF Radio Controlled Improvised Explosive Devices Electronic Counter Measures” (30 March 2004).
19. Jon M. Anderson, “The New Wizard War: Challenges and Opportunities for Electronic Warfare in the Information Age.” U.S. Naval War College (6 November 2007) at <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA476476>.
20. On 9 February 2004, LGen Rick Hillier of Canada took command, with Maj Gen Werner Korte of Germany as deputy.
21. Telephone interview with BGen Alain Tremblay (13 January 2011).
22. Telephone interview with Leslie (11 January 2011); Sirois interview.
23. Tremblay interview.

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24. Tremblay and Sirois interviews.
25. Sirois interview.
26. Message Tremblay to COS J3, "Training of the Afghan National Army Embedded Training Team (ETT) Op PHOENIX" (11 February 2004).
27. NCE SITREP (29 February 2004).
28. In December 2003, the North Atlantic Council authorized SACEUR, General James Jones, to initiate the expansion of ISAF by taking over command of the German-led PRT in Konduz. On 31 December 2003, the military component of the Konduz PRT was placed under ISAF command as a pilot project and first step in the expansion of the mission.
29. Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2009), p. 258.
30. Message TFK to NDHQ, "Op MAELSTROM-Fr Bn Gp Task" (10 February 2004); NCE SITREP (15 February 2004); Lacroix interview.
31. Lacroix interview. Whether this reflected an increase in the number of terrorists available in Kabul to be caught or if it reflected an increase in the ability of KMNB and allied agencies to go after them needs more detailed examination.
32. Lacroix interview.
33. "Op SPEED" (30 March 2004); NCE SITREP (1 April 2004); "Op SPEED-SSE Report" (3 April 2004).
34. HQ ISAF SITREP (31 March 2004); NCE SITREP (1 April 2004).
35. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Commander's End Tour Report" (4 August 2004).
36. Ibid.
37. "Présentation 3eR22eR Gp Bataillon" (29 March 2004).
38. NCE SITREP (19 February 2004); HQ KMNB SITREP (23 February 2004); TF Engineer to Commander TFK, "Operational Readiness Declaration of the Improvised Explosive Device Destruction Teams (IEDD)" (4 March 2004).
39. Memorandum to DCDS from COS j3 "Op ATHENA-op COBRA Update" (27 February 2004); NCE SITREP (29 February 2004); NCE SITREP (1 March 2004); NCE SITREP (3 March 2004).
40. NCE SITREP (29 February 2004).
41. HQ KMNB SITREP (27 February 2004); HQ KMNB SITREP (5 March 2004); HQ KMNB SITREP (9 March 2004).
42. HQ KMNB SITREP (5 April 2004).
43. Memorandum COS J3 to DCDS, "Op ATHENA-LUVW Fielding to TFK" (24 February 2004).
44. Message NCE to NDHQ, "Op SCORPION" (26 March 2004); NCE SITREP (29 March 2004); "Op SCORPION-SSE Report" (3 April 2004).
45. HQ KMNB SITREP (30 March 2004); NCE SITREP (30 March 2004).
46. 3 R22eR Battalion Group, "TFK Community Improvement Programme (CIP) End-Tour Report" (30 July 2004).
47. Tremblay interview. Tremblay claims the CIP contributed to the prevention of attacks on Camp Julien. Another view was that the comparative lack of aggressive 3eR22eR activity in the AOR meant that the Canadian contingent wasn't getting into the hair of those who would want to "signal" the Canadians using violence, therefore there was nothing to be gained by attacking the camp. KMNB's increasing aggressive counter-terrorism operations with the police and NDS would also have had something to do with reducing the probability of attacks on Camp Julien.

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48. "TFK Community Improvement Programme (CIP) End Rotation Report" (30 July 2004).
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. "Op ATHENA Task Force Commander's Mid-Tour Report" (7 May 2004).
52. Ibid.
53. Memoranda between DCDS and COS J3 and NCE (7 June 2004) (10 June 2004).
54. As discussed in *Confronting the Chaos*.
55. In November 2003, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) was established as the U.S.-led, coalition headquarters for Afghanistan formation that directed all OEF operations in Afghanistan. CTJF-180 was restructured as a subordinate organization of CFC-A. CFC-A reported in turn to CENTCOM.
56. HQ ISAF SITREP (11 February 2004) (12 February 2004) (19 February 2004). JEMB Fact Sheet, "Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council Elections Afghanistan 2005."
57. HQ ISAF SITREP (18 February 2004).
58. HQ ISAF SITREP (2 March 2004) (5 March 2004).
59. HQ ISAF SITREP (1 April 2004) (4 April 2004).
60. HQ ISAF SITREP (28 February 2004).
61. "Final Report of Meetings: The Military Committee in Chiefs of Staff Session: Critical Shortfalls for CJSOR" (5-6 May 2004).
62. Letter SECGEN NATO to Canadian Ambassador (7 May 2004).
63. HQ ISAF SITREP (16 April 2004).
64. HQ ISAF SITREP (14 February 2004).
65. HQ ISAF SITREP (16 February 2004).
66. Sirois interview.
67. ISAF HQ SITREP (3 March 2004); KMNB SITREP (3 March 2004); ISAF SITREP (8 March 2004).
68. HQ ISAF SITREP (9 March 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (11 March 2004).
69. HQ ISAF SITREP (25 March 2004). See also Barbara Stapleton, "Disarming the Militias: DDR and DIAG and the Implications for Peace Building," in Markus Hakansson (ed), *Peacebuilding in Afghanistan* (2009).
70. HQ ISAF SITREP (31 March 2004).
71. Ibid.
72. COMISAF Update (9 May 2004).
73. COMISAF Update (12 May 2004).
74. COMISAF Update (19 May 2004).
75. Ibid. HQ ISAF SITREP (19 May 2004).
76. HQ ISAF SITREPS (10 May 2004) (23 May 2004) (2 June 2004).
77. HQ ISAF SITREPS (29 May 2004) (3 June 2004) (5 June 2004) (14 June 2004).

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78. Lacroix interview.
79. COS J3 to DCDS, "Op ATHENA-Request to Deploy Forces Outside of the ISAF Area of Operations" (14 May 2004).
80. KMNB, "Op HERMES Operations Order" (May 2004).
81. Ibid. Lacroix interview.
82. Ibid.
83. KMNB SITREP (13 May 2004); NCE to DCDS "Op HERMES-Phase One Koh-e Safi" (21 May 2004).
84. KMNB SITREP (31 May 2004). Lacroix interview.
85. HQ ISAF SITREP (27 June 2004).
86. NCE SITREPS (June 2004).
87. HQ ISAF SITREP (19 May 2004).
88. ISAF HQ SITREP (5 June 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (13 June 2004).
89. HQ ISAF SITREP (17 June 2004).
90. NCE SITREP (2 April 2004).
91. NCE SITREP (31 March 2004); COMISAF Update (31 March 2004). NCE "Post-Op Report: Op DAMOCLES II" (10 May 2004).
92. NCE SITREP (16 May 2004).
93. HQ ISAF SITREP (27 May 2004); NCE SITREP and message NCE to NDHQ "Op PENELOPE" (26 May 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (31 March 2004).
94. "Operation ATHENA Board of Inquiry Rotation 1 3 R22eR Battalion Group" (6 August 2004).
95. NCE SITREP (25 June 2004); Lacroix interview. BGen Lacroix explained that he was told by US OGA personnel that Idema was working for them. Others implied that Idema was rogue and was working with Fahim. Still others said all three. It was next to impossible to tell what was really going on. Idema died in Mexico in 2012 of a terminal illness.
96. COMISAF and CFC-A meeting (25 January 2004).
97. Ibid.
98. COMISAF Update (12 May 2004).
99. COMISAF Update (9 May 2004).
100. HQ ISAF SITREP (22 May 2004).
101. ISAF HQ SITREP (15 July 2004).
102. HQ ISAF SITREP (10 June 2004).
103. COMISAF Update (23 May 2004); HQ ISAF SITREP (27 June 2004).
104. ISAF HQ SITREP (7 July 2004).
105. Tremblay to DL, "Canadian Embedded Training Team" (16 April 2004).
106. Ibid.
107. NCE SITREP (16 May 2004); message NDHQ to DL "CA ETT Deployment to Mazar-e Sharif" (1 August 2004).

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108. Tremblay interview.
109. HQ ISAF SITREP (4 July 2004).
110. Message NCE to NDHQ, "CA ETT Mazar-e Sharif Approval" (4 August 2004).
111. The fascinating and deep politics of Herat are beyond the scope of this study, unfortunately.
112. See Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
113. Ibid.
114. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Commander's End Tour Report" (4 August 2004).
115. Ibid.
116. HQ ISAF SITREP (29 June 2004).
117. Lacroix interview.
118. Letter CDS and DM to MND, "Future of CF Operation in Southwest Asia" (8 October 2003).
119. Letter Henault to Jones (2 November 2003).
120. Minutes: ISAF Strategic Coordination Group Meeting (18 December 2003).
121. CDS to D SACEUR, "Canadian Withdrawal from ISAF" (4 February 2004).
122. CDS to distribution list, "Op ATHENA-Canadian Contribution Post-August 2004" (19 January 2004).
123. Letter NATO SECGEN to MND (23 February 2004).
124. "Trip Report-NATO ISAF VI Force Generation Conference, 11 March 2004" (11 March 2004).
125. Minutes of an interdepartmental meeting "Afghanistan: PRTs and ISAF Expansion" (28 May 2004).
126. Letter PM Tony Blair to PM Paul Martin (18 May 2004).
127. Minutes of an interdepartmental meeting "Afghanistan: PRTs and ISAF Expansion" (28 May 2004).
128. Ibid.

‘RESIDUAL CAPABILITIES’:

OPERATION ATHENA IN KABUL, SEPTEMBER 2004-MAY 2005

The Canadian Army maintained a presence in Kabul after the withdrawal of the bulk of the force in August 2004. Dubbed the “residual capability” by the planners, the new but drastically reduced iterations of TF Kabul continued, in various ways, to contribute to the stability of the capital. Unlike previous rotations, however, the new force was not salient enough for Canada to retain the same high level of influence that it enjoyed in 2003–2004. In effect, the “residual capability” rotations acted as a bridge between Kabul and Kandahar. The difficulty of writing about them lies in the routine nature of their operations and the series of disparate threads left over from the previous rotations. In most cases, framework operations conducted by recce squadrons were nearly identical to those conducted during Roto 0 and 1, for example. That said, it is patently unfair to completely overlook the contributions of Canadian soldiers who deployed with these rotations, especially given the risk involved in a dangerous environment.

For the most part, the importance of their contributions related to the security operations surrounding the 2004 presidential elections. The new Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which finally replaced the Afghan Transitional Administration, and formed the basis of development and reconstruction activities in subsequent years, garnered the comparatively high level of legitimacy. Those activities remain questionable in their effectiveness over the long term even as this history is produced. It must be understood, however, that the spirit of optimism that existed then was very real; there was a carnival-like atmosphere that surrounded the 2004 elections. It is possible to track a trajectory starting with the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga, through to the 2004 Presidential Elections, to the 2005 Provincial Elections, and see positive Canadian Army involvement throughout the course of that trajectory. At the same time, Canada’s role in Afghanistan was evolving as the soldiers of TF Kabul continued with their security missions. The other major aspect of the final Operation ATHENA rotations was the progressive draw-down of the Kabul forces and their relocation to their new home in Kandahar province.

Operation ATHENA Roto 2: Organization

Canadian objectives remained the same for this rotation, that is, “To prevent Afghanistan from relapsing into a failed state where terrorists and terrorist organizations would be provided safe haven.”¹ And, as before, the force remit was to “Assist ISAF and Afghanistan

security institutions in ensuring a secure environment within the Kabul [area of operation] with a view to facilitating Afghan national development.” As we have seen, however, Operation ATHENA was also maintained in Kabul to keep Canada’s options open and to maintain a ‘foot on the ground’ in Afghanistan as much as anything, so there was an impetus to retain as much situational awareness as possible.²

Col Jim Ellis brought in a task force that was significantly different from previous Operation ATHENA rotations. The employment of certain elements of TF Kabul had several command and control complications imposed on them by circumstances and design. It is critical to note here that Operation ATHENA Roto 2, with its 711 personnel, was not structured to handle Voter Registration and Election operations, let alone heavy weapons cantonment, DDR, or many of the other Kabul area activities that were already familiar. Recall that the elections were supposed to take place during Roto 1 but were delayed. The DCDS and staff would not entertain increasing the manpower cap for Roto 2. As a result, there was a significant amount of back-and-forth communication between Kabul and Ottawa over what amounted to the employment, addition, or subtraction of small numbers of soldiers.³

The main effort was the employment of the recce squadron group (sometimes referred to as Surveillance Squadron) led by Maj Derek Macaulay. This sub-unit was cut to KMNB, now commanded by the Franco-German Brigade, a non-NATO headquarters that replaced the Canadian-led headquarters. Recce Squadron continued to use Coyote vehicles but was augmented with snipers, engineers and an infantry platoon from 3 PPCLI in what was termed the “Close Reconnaissance Role.” This was a doctrinal experiment whereby the Coyotes would identify a target and the platoon, mounted in G-Wagons, would investigate and report.⁴



Photo Credit: Author

Camp Julien remained an operational camp after the bulk of Canadian troops were withdrawn in 2004. An important facility was the deep well and water point established by Canadian engineers for use by the population. Here two water trucks replenish at the ‘tap.’

The All Source Intelligence Centre under Maj Dave Travers, however, remained an undeclared national asset. The TUAVs were all gone and there was a reduced Canadian human intelligence organization. The ISTAR Company concept employed in Roto 0 was now defunct, along with the synergies it produced.⁵ There were some initial problems as the ASIC was not fully manned but more importantly, there was some loss of continuity during the previous rotation, which “did not continue the liaison associations established by Roto 0 for reasons beyond their control. Past contacts have been lost which are proving difficult to re-establish.”⁶ The new ASIC worked hard to re-establish those relationships and ultimately became “vital to [Commander TF Kabul’s] situational awareness and were able to make up for shortfalls in intelligence support from ISAF and KMNB HQ.”⁷

TF Kabul also had 11 Field Squadron from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment, which was responsible for IEDD and EOD operations, although this was all starting to blend. The introduction of a small number of Icarus electronic countermeasures jamming sets to form electronic countermeasure detachments was handled through a slight reorganization. 11 Field Squadron contributed to the ISAF Immediate Response Team rotations when IED or EOD incidents occurred. Also of significance were the relationships 11 Field Squadron maintained and expanded with a variety of allied organizations who were dealing with the relatively new IED threat at the time. This included the Kabul EOD Coordination Centre, the United Nations Mine Action Center for Afghanistan, and the newly established combined explosives exploitation cell, an American counter-IED organization. Canadian combat engineers in later rotations benefited from that relationship and built on it as well.⁸

Canada’s other main effort was maintaining Camp Julien. Camp Julien remained the only ISAF facility on the other side of the inter-city mountain chain. As such, agreements were made to support KMNB’s Battle Group 3, which technically replaced 3eR22eR Battalion Group. Battle Group 3 included a Belgian SAS Company (not special operations forces but essentially a light-mounted recce unit) and a Hungarian mechanized infantry company incongruously equipped with Soviet BTR-80s mounting 20mm cannons. A 12-man Norwegian CIMIC group also operated from the camp and the Slovenian contingent continued with its operations.

Camp Julien also continued to host the Canadian ETT, led by Maj Brian Hynes, as well as 50 American soldiers serving with TF Phoenix working across the road at the Afghan National Army training camp. In time, when the Election Support Force deployed to Kabul in October 2004, an additional 100+ Americans from TF Apache set up temporary living facilities near the abandoned Canadian artillery and TUAV launch positions.



Photo Credit: Author

Camp Julien hosted numerous other allied contingents in late 2004. These included a Belgian reconnaissance unit, an American training unit, a Slovenian reconnaissance unit, and a Hungarian Army armoured unit equipped with modified BTR-80 vehicles.

Supporting all of this fell to the 92-man NSE under LCol Charles Lamarre and 500 CANCAP contractors (note that there were nearly as many contractors on the camp as Canadian soldiers). Most importantly, Camp Julien had a Role 2+ medical facility and six Bison ambulances from 1 Field Ambulance, the only such capability south of the mountains, and the hospital had a secure helipad.⁹

Protecting Camp Julien was a significant issue as the camp had over four kilometres of HESCO bastion wall to cover. The Canadian debate over numbers of ‘effectives’ related to this. TF Kabul was allocated only two LAV III-based infantry platoons, with no company headquarters. One of these platoons was the QRF with sections on 5-, 15-, and 30-minute notice to move. Local agreements were made to gain a platoon from the other non-Canadian contingents, which in turn reduced their patrolling capacity in the surrounding PDs. In time, Ottawa acquiesced to permit a third LAV III platoon to deploy – but only for three months. This third platoon was sent to protect the mission draw-down team and escort convoys back and forth to Kabul airport. Other than that, a scratch operational reserve platoon of cooks, clerks, and bottle washers had to be formed to assist with camp security. The situation produced some pressure on Recce Squadron, which technically “belonged” to KMNB and had an infantry platoon.¹⁰ It was, in effect, a balancing act with some significant risk attached to it. Indeed, it looked to some as though TF Kabul’s job was to protect itself.

Roto 2 Operations

Roto 2 operations can generally be broken down into two categories: recce squadron group operations and operations designed to maintain Camp Julien security. Gone were the DDR/heavy weapons cantonment support operations. There was no Canadian area of operations anymore either; Battle Group 3 took over that battlespace. Police training dropped off. As for development and reconstruction, the flow of CIDA money was completely shut off. There was a small CIMIC detachment, however. They cobbled together the remaining \$17 000 in the budget and then raised money back in Canada from the Chilliwack Rotary Club and the Knox Met Choir to support what local initiatives they could.¹¹

In the run-up to the elections, ISAF expanded its area of operation in Kabul province. Known as the “ISAF Joint Operating Area,” it encompassed all of those nooks and crannies that constituted ambiguities between ISAF and CFC-A operating areas. Naturally, this posed problems between Roto 2 and the DCDS staff on authorizations to deploy to the peripheries of, or outside, the ISAF joint operating area. Quite literally, neither organization was on the same page for some time, which put an end to anything resembling Operation HERMES from the previous rotation. Roto 2 tried to deploy to Sarobi district (Operation GRANITE) but was turned down. KMNB was not keen either on the Koh-e Safi operations, nor did they like the planned Operation WHISTLER and TIMBERWOLF deployments to Logar province, so the momentum developed by the Operation HERMES programme during Roto 1 essentially collapsed.¹²

During its tenure in Kabul, Roto 2 and ISAF were plagued with rocket attacks similar to the types used before. From September to October 2004, there were more than 22 recorded 107mm and 122mm rockets attacks on the city, more than in the previous year combined. This became a serious information operations issue for ISAF as Afghan and international media escalated their criticisms of the ‘lack’ of security in the run-up to the elections. This, of course, is exactly what the insurgents wanted but the inability of the international community, ISAF or CFC-A to develop a coordinated public response with the Afghan Transitional Administration to the criticism took its toll. Roto 2 and the recce squadron group already had Operation HORSESHOE on the books – this was the counter-rocket surveillance plan for Camp Julien where Coyotes and infantry patrols would work the mountainous rural areas west of the camp to deter attacks. When KMNB tried to use RATTLESNAKE as the basis of a larger counter-rocket deterrence plan, however, there were internal disputes with competing plans – one was Operation HUNTER, the other Operation OCTOPUS. It took some time to deconflict these operations.¹³



Photo Credit: Author

Rocket attacks increased in 2004 during the run-up to the national elections, but the city saw nothing remotely like the amount of devastation inflicted by Pakistani-backed forces in 1992-1993. This example, to the right of the Blowpipe surface-to-air missile, landed near Camp Julien but failed to detonate.

Command and Control Issues with ISAF and KMNB

The change in ISAF command from two Canadian-led headquarters to two European multinational headquarters based on non-NATO commands was challenging on several levels for the new Canadian contingent. ISAF HQ was now based on the French-led Eurocorps, while KMNB was commanded by a German-led Franco-German Brigade HQ. The vertically integrated system Canada had in place in Kabul no longer existed. At the same time, Eurocorps introduced a serious break in continuity as it struggled to adapt to the Kabul environment. The situation was replicated at KMNB, which generated problems for the recce squadron group. There were conflicting plans within KMNB as to how the squadron should be employed and, at times, these plans contradicted each other, to the consternation of Maj Macaulay and his troops. For example, one KMNB entity generated a surveillance plan positioning Coyote vehicles in key locations. This plan was suddenly replaced with a plan generated by another KMNB staff changing the name of the operation and offsetting the Coyote positions to places they chose. Which plan was to be used?¹⁴

Col Ellis and Commander KMNB “did not get along that well. He liked the Recce Squadron but he was always convinced that Canada was doing operations that he did not know about, that we were doing operations because we had [CANSOF] there and we had all kinds of stuff that he thought was going on. We did not. We had a couple of nose-to-nose discussions quietly behind doors on who was doing what.” This was where the restrictive command and control arrangements from the DCDS became useful. Col Ellis and his staff did not want KMNB “sending half a recce squadron through an un-cleared area” where terrorists might be operating “just to grab a few rifles.”¹⁵

KMNB did not have access to the Canadian ASIC, in part because France and Germany were not part of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing framework. Balkans-era suspicions and frictions, not new nor were they even secret problems by any stretch of the imagination, imbued the system with distrust. With the French in charge, the Americans were less and less likely to coordinate their nocturnal activities with ISAF than they did when the Canadians were commanding ISAF. Indeed, an entity was caught directing signals intelligence collections systems at the Canadian ASIC inside Camp Julien because an entity thought Canada was operating independently or with the British and Americans and not coordinating with KMNB. The ‘Balkanization’ of the KMNB effort thus progressed over Operation ATHENA Roto 2’s tenure.¹⁶

Canada had a number of undeclared assets in Kabul at the time, including a CANSOF detachment, some signals intercept capabilities, a field security team and certain counter-IED capabilities. There was a Mobile Electronic Warfare Team detached to the recce squadron group, but it remained a Canadian asset. These were closely protected assets and it was unrealistic that they, or the raw information they produced, would just be handed over to another nation or multinational headquarters for indiscriminate use. Indeed, no other nation would do the same in any event. Col Ellis believed that “Our intelligence was better than theirs was and I would go on occasion to see General Py, Commander ISAF and I could see his frustration, but I can’t give them the ASIC because of that security piece with the Americans, the Americans wouldn’t link to them. At the end of the day, I would tell them things because it would impact their force protection and ours. We made sure that in fact the intelligence we had was focusing on the threat, got to them somehow and we never had an incident.”¹⁷

The structure of the Canadian contribution to ISAF in 2004–2005 underscored the limitations of a multinational approach to operations in such a complex environment. For whatever reasons, the new KMNB was not as effective or as efficient as its predecessors and there was a subsequent drop in Canadian confidence in it.¹⁸



Photo Credit: DND K-A2004-A0200

Terrorism conducted by the ‘usual suspects’ remained the primary threat to Canadian ISAF troops throughout 2004. Working with police, intelligence units, and special operations forces, ISAF regularly disrupted attacks that would have generated mass casualty events.

At a higher level, ISAF HQ and its activities were now beyond the purview of the Canadian contingent. There were six mid-level Canadian staff officers in that headquarters, none of whom held senior positions. Canada had no influence on the direction of ISAF activity within the country, let alone Kabul, in these venues. The recce squadron group and Camp Julien were not enough of a “hand” to join the game. As discussed later, the high-level development initiatives critical for stabilizing Afghanistan nurtured by Generals Leslie and Hillier in 2003–2004 were virtually all shut down, diluted, or altered beyond recognition by the new commanders.

Indeed, the shared opinion of Canadian and other observers from CFC-A was that ISAF HQ was “unworkable, dysfunctional, and a mockery of military standards.” The situation was of such concern that one Canadian officer baldly stated that “Animosity between key commanders of the staff is hidden beneath the surface and the veneer of camaraderie is only too easily scratched to reveal weaknesses that could even endanger lives.”¹⁹

Ongoing Strategy Issues

The onset of Eurocorps as the ISAF lead severed much of the strategic continuity that was starting to develop between ISAF, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, and the UN. The personality-based coordination between the Canadian ISAF HQ and CFC-A essentially collapsed for several reasons: Eurocorps was simply not interested and there were suspicions between the French-led force and the Americans. There was “a lot of animosity between the ISAF group that took over from General Hillier’s group and [Eurocorps]... Canada was seen as quite a key player during those days in Kabul and then when the Europeans took over it was a bit more fragmented....”²⁰ Of course, the anti-American zeitgeist that existed in the wake of the Iraq war played a significant role in these events. Eurocorps jettisoned the prototype national development strategy, something painstakingly crafted by ISAF Canadians (and based on World Bank planning) while it was in the process of being assimilated by their American counterparts in Bagram and in Washington. This set the international community effort in Afghanistan back a year and half.²¹

Fortunately Lt Gen David Barno at CFC-A was already working on a campaign plan which had as its focus Voter Registration and Election operations for the 2004 presidential elections. The CFC-A plan was deficient in the development arena (and that was where Hillier’s ISAF HQ was trying to mate its work and CFC-A’s work) but not in the voter registration, election and security areas. CFC-A planners correctly identified Voter Registration and Election operations as the main effort and linked the elections to legitimacy. From there, CFC-A developed several lines of operations.²²

A number of important aspects regarding the implementation of the CFC-A campaign plan had long-term effects, especially in the south in later years. First, and most important, the CFC-A campaign plan recognized that NATO ISAF would expand in Afghanistan and that expansion would probably follow in succession through the four regional commands already established by CFC-A. The issue was NATO resourcing. CFC-A was preparing to support NATO expansion if or when it occurred.

Second, CFC-A altered how Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces conducted operations, shifting from a “raid” strategy relying on the bases at Kandahar, Bagram and Khost, to deploying task forces and PRTs to the regional commands. The main areas of limited insurgent activity were eastern Oruzgan, Kandahar, upper Helmand, and four provinces in Regional Command (East) bordering Pakistan – Paktia, Paktika and Khost, plus Nangarhar. For the most part, these were remote areas, away from the population centres and the enemy was focusing on ‘soft’ targets: development and reconstruction agencies for the most part plus local governance. Working with UNAMA, CFC-A wanted to create Regional Development Zones (RDZs) that would focus the following energies in each zone:

- good governance;
- judiciary;
- expansion of the Afghan National Army;
- expansion of the police regional training centers;
- aid and reconstruction; and
- combat forces.

In the RDZ approach, the PRT and the task force in each province would work together with other agencies in the ‘security sector reform’ pillars to stabilize each region. Combat forces, special operations and conventional, would go after the insurgents in the remote areas to keep them away from the RDZs.²³ The pilot RDZ was scheduled to be set up in Kandahar province sometime in late 2004 or 2005, though they were also resource-dependent and there was still some question about how the projected RDZs related to NATO expansion.

Notably, CFC-A planning behaved as though the power brokers and their militias were of declining influence, even though DDR was still ongoing. This clearly reflected the cumulative positive results of ISAF operations in Kabul in 2003 and of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM operations in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif in 2004. In effect, the CFC-A campaign plan was the only game in town in 2004–2005 when it came to countrywide strategy, and while the presidential elections and provincial elections security planning ramped up after the presidential inauguration in December 2004.

From Embedded Training Team to the Afghan National Training Centre

When the ETT story last left off, authorities in Ottawa would not approve Operation DIANA, the Mazar-e Sharif deployment. This led to a re-examination of ETT operations. The DCDS staff recognized that:

Less tangible but even more important are the long-term relationships [the ETT] developed with the ANA leadership and the recognition by Afghan society that we have left a solution in place after we go. This will be particularly important as Canada continues with PRT programs and follow-on development programs.²⁴

The issue of having Canadian ETT personnel drawn from an ISAF mission working with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, a separate coalition, was resolved. Operation ARCHER, distinct from Operation ATHENA, was stood up as a separate mission to encompass the ETT and all Canadian staff officers working in American-led coalition headquarters like CFC-A. Consequently, the 14-man ETT in Camp Julien became part of Operation ARCHER, even though TF Kabul still commanded them and they drew support from Canadians in Operation ATHENA. They were still restricted, however, to the Kabul area of operations and not permitted to deploy to Shindand or Herat.

The Canadian ETT continued to provide its professional services to 1st Brigade of the Afghan National Army and especially 4th Kandak, the combat support kandak. The ETTs also significantly contributed to the mentoring of the Afghan National Army Regional Command elements destined for Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, and Gardez. These formed the basis of the four Afghan National Army corps commands that paralleled the NATO and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM regional commands. Those relationships paid off in the future when Canada committed to Regional Command (South) and the Afghan National Army deployed 205 Corps to that region.²⁵

The strong links established with the Afghan National Army produced Operation RAVEN. Afghan information, vetted by ASIC information and other sources, located a HiG terrorist leader and the cell that was involved in the Murphy killing. They were based out of the village of Tanji Sidan, about five kilometres from Camp Julien. TF Kabul provided the targeting package to KMNB, who ignored it. Elements in the Afghan National Army were then given the package and within hours, they prepared the operation. Attempts by TF Kabul to use the recce squadron group to surveil the target area and get the ASIC to do the site exploitation were initially rebuffed by authorities in Ottawa during the targeting process. As a result, 23rd Kandak conducted the operation with Canadian embedded trainers as “observers.” Operation RAVEN became a full kandak cordon and search operation, which then swooped down on Tanji Sidan in the early hours of the morning, bagging two HiG commanders, one of whom turned out to be number four in the Kabul area and who had literally had to change his pants after seeing the ETTs with Canadian flags on their shoulders. Exploitation resulted in the further takedowns of weapon caches and the overall disruption of HiG activity during the Presidential Inauguration in December 2004.²⁶

Ultimately, however, the unwillingness of authorities in Ottawa to permit Canadian ETT deployments led to further changes. ETTs were increasingly required to deploy as the Afghan National Army spread out in Afghanistan to replace the militias and if Canada’s contribution could not deploy, it could not really be called an ETT. TF Phoenix was in the process of establishing a more formalized organization, the Afghan National Training Centre,

and it required staffing. By the end of Operation ATHENA Roto 2, the Canadian ETT was converted to a training detachment of the Afghan National Training Centre with the agreement of NDHQ and the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan.²⁷



Photo Credit: Author

By 2004-2005, the Canadian Embedded Training Team was re-roled as the Canadian contribution to the Afghan National Training Centre, a facility responsible for building up the Afghan National Army.



Photo Credit: Author

Any government must maintain a monopoly on coercive force. Removal of Afghan militia forces weapons coupled with the increase in the Afghan National Army's capabilities eventually undermined the ability of power brokers to openly coerce the political process.

2004 Election Security Operations

On 9 October 2004, 8.5 of the 10 million Afghan voters registered in the voter registration process and went to the polls to participate in the first democratic elections held in the country in over 30 years. The Taliban and other anti-government entities had been invited to participate back in April, but no Taliban party emerged to argue its case for a return to Islamist despotism. Once the elections were announced, the Taliban and its allies had used every weapon in their arsenals in an attempt to destabilize the country and discredit the elections. Elections personnel had been assassinated. Others were kidnapped or otherwise intimidated. Security forces were strained with suicide IED attacks. Yet millions of people, including a high proportion of women, turned out to exercise their new democratic franchise despite these pressures. And, in response to claims that there was widespread elections fraud, an independent Canadian/Swedish/British team plus 230 international observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan all concluded that, as elections went, it was fairly conducted. Not perfect, but fairly conducted.²⁸

The significance of the elections in the course of events was that it not only gave the new Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan legitimacy in the eyes of the population, it seriously marginalized the power brokers and also created the conditions so that the large international organizations could examine how exactly to deploy development aid and reconstruction monies to the stricken land. That was not possible prior to the elections in any meaningful, large-scale fashion. The elections also heightened expectations that help was finally on the way. LCol George Petrolekas, a Canadian liaison officer with NATO, noted however that “The political ramifications of this success are far-reaching and bode well for the future as long as we in the International Community don’t squander our gains.”²⁹

Maj Deitra Korando, a senior American intelligence analyst at CFC-A, believed “that the Taliban suffered a huge defeat. They were never able to generate enough of anything to derail the process itself...on actual election day, their attempts were every feeble: a couple of rocket attacks, a couple of attempts to enter Kabul. But really, ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force in conjunction with the Kabul police, had locked down the city pretty tight, so the attempts made were largely ineffective and were caught well outside the city.”³⁰



Photo Credit: Author

With the fog-shrouded central hills to the northeast as a backdrop and the Darulaman Palace complex and Camp Julien in the centre, an observer in the hills can see the vital vote counting facility protected by the Afghan National Army training base in the foreground.

Canada's forces played a significant part in this effort. The following actions all set the conditions for the 2004 elections:

1. the protection of the Constitutional Loya Jirga and interference with power broker agendas in Kabul to gain recognition for a transitional administration 'under one tent';
2. the removal of heavy weapons as a coercive factor in Kabul;
3. the dilution of the militias through the DDR process and the reduction of their coercive capability;
4. the protection and projection of the voter registration process in the face of terrorism; and
5. the removal of key terrorist leaders and cells long before they could act.

Roto 2's contribution was also part of this trajectory, particularly in September and October 2004. NATO established, after some strenuous debate, an Election Support Force designed to temporarily augment ISAF security operations during the elections period. How and why NATO could deploy the 9 000 personnel Election Support Force and not find 500 personnel for Kabul Afghanistan International Airport is an intriguing question.



Photo Credit: Author, from a map courtesy of Maj Brian Hynes

The Canadian Embedded Training Team led by Maj Brian Hynes with 23rd Kandak learned that an Afghan officer had been part of Hezb-e Islami in 1992-1993 and knew where all the previous rocket launching sites southwest of the city were located. These were aggressively patrolled during the 2004 election.

But for the record, the Election Support Force deployed a Spanish infantry battalion to Mazar-e Sharif, an Italian battalion to Kabul, an American mechanized infantry company to Kabul, six Dutch F-16s for close air support, and airborne warning and control system aircraft on standby as the Taliban had no air force. It remains unclear what the aircraft were there for other than to demonstrate solidarity and/or boost numbers.³¹

Camp Julien supported TF Apache, the American mechanized infantry company equipped with M-113s and Hummers, which handled a QRF role in Kabul. The JEMB/UNAMA ballot Central Region Counting House was established in the Afghan training camp adjacent to Camp Julien. The Canadian ETTs worked with 23rd Kandak to establish tight security of that crucial facility where nearly 50% of the votes in the country were counted by elections staff. This involved close mentoring at the headquarters and planning levels – and it all was not one way. Notably, one of the 23rd Kandak officers had been an antagonist during the 1992-1993 troubles and knew where all of the former rocket launch locations were in the hills west of the camp. He passed this information on by sketching it on a map and providing it to Maj Hynes.

23rd Kandak with its Canadian ETTs worked with the recce squadron group's Operation HORSESHOE to deter attacks against both facilities. No rockets were launched from those areas during the elections process.³² Canada also provided escort and route protection to the ballot convoys (Operation PRONGHORN) and patrolled polling stations within Battalion Group 3's area of operations.³³

Behind the scenes, Maj Travers and the ASIC, and Maj Macaulay and Recce Squadron were part of a series of operations that completely dislocated Taliban, HiG, and Al Qaeda terrorist cells throughout the city. The first was Operation DRUMHELLER, mounted in mid-September 2004. Credible intelligence reporting suggested that over 800 kilograms of explosives was inbound from Pakistan. The recce squadron group deployed to maintain observation on Routes Indigo and Red to look for the vehicle in question but it was tracked. Ultimately, other parties intercepted the end-users.³⁴

The most dramatic was Operation FOX. British sources developed information with the ASIC on four separate terrorist cells in Kabul. Recce's Coyotes were positioned to maintain observation on safe houses and on the principles as they rehearsed their attacks. On the night of 29 September 2004, the United Kingdom patrol company and the Kabul City Police raided four locations, arresting all four cells totaling 20 personnel. This was a major breakthrough; the ASIC conducted sensitive site exploitation and uncovered linkages between all four cells and a number of terrorist entities in Europe, plus evidence of transit and assistance provided by support cells located in the UAE, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.³⁵

Romanian sources indicated that a truck full of explosives was inbound from Wardak province on 2 October. The Norwegian battle group established vehicle checkpoints with the Kabul City Police and found the truck: 11 Field Squadron deployed its EOD/IEDD robots and teams to support the effort.³⁶ Operation RACCOON, another United Kingdom Patrol Company/Kabul City Police raid supported by Canadian Recce Squadron and ASIC exploitation, netted a whole HiG cell with firearms and explosives.³⁷

The Canadian Field Security Team even got one in on 5 October when a source they developed revealed that a terrorist group was rigging a large propane tank to be used by an Al Qaeda cell as an IED against the UNAMA Central Region Counting House. The device was under construction at a facility five kilometres from Camp Julien, but was outside Canadian 'jurisdiction'. The Hungarian company from Battle Group 3 was then tasked to work with the Kabul City Police for the takedown. Unfortunately, there were language difficulties and the raid went into the wrong compound. Working rapidly, the ASIC staff was able to contact the NDS's counterterrorism specialists and re-vector a team onto the right location. 11 Field's experts were brought in to "safe" the device.³⁸

In the space of a week, ISAF, with Canadian support, was able to tear the guts out of terrorist activity in Kabul. All of this significantly and even dramatically contributed to

the success of the 2004 elections, despite manpower limitations, national caveats, coalition command and control failures, and personality conflicts. Arguably, this was Roto 2's ultimate contribution to the stabilization effort in Afghanistan.

Toward the end of October 2004, however, armed men kidnapped three JEMB officials. It was unclear if this was insurgent activity or if it was criminal or power broker-oriented. If it was insurgent-related and designed to intimidate the JEMB, they were too late. Unfortunately, it added to an increased siege mentality on the part of the international aid organizations, with subsequent detrimental effects. The three captives were released a month later leading some in TF Kabul to conclude that the event may have been driven by monetary considerations and not ideological ones.³⁹

The 2004 elections marked a new era for Afghans. Independent investigations into voter fraud concluded that "election irregularities did not materially affect the outcome." On 3 November 2004, Hamid Karzai was declared president of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for a five-year term with 55% of the vote. Yunis Qanuni came in second, with 16%, followed by Mohaqqueq with 11.7%. Dostum got 10% of the vote.

Of the major power brokers, Abdul Rahim Wardak replaced Fahim as Minister of Defence. Abdullah Abdullah was retained as Foreign Minister, but Ismael Khan and Dostum were appointed Minister of Water and Energy and as military chief of staff to Karzai respectively. As the DDR programme shifted to the more problematic DIAG programme, power broker AMF formations were slowly reduced in and around Kabul to shadows of themselves.⁴⁰

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf progressively lost influence over time. A KMNB surge operation into Paghman district forced Sayyaf to unmask several weapons caches, which prompted General Wardak from the Ministry of Defence to intervene and ask KMNB to cease operations. As a result, Wardak convinced Sayyaf to adopt a more conciliatory tone when it came to ISAF and the international community. Canadian CIMIC noted that there was "increasing discontent in Sayyaf's neighbourhood over Sayyaf. Paghman residents are now asking what can be done about him. There is increased trust in the Afghan Transitional Administration and ISAF."⁴¹

Hamid Karzai was inaugurated in December 2004. The road was opening up for the Afghans and their international partners to formulate a national development strategy, access the requisite monetary resources, and start repairing the country – if the momentum could be maintained. Canadian ambassador Chris Alexander was concerned that continuity in Kabul was compromised, that ISAF under the Eurocorps was "inert" in comparison with the Canadian-led iterations. The Turkish Corps was on the horizon, however, and things might revert to a more active approach.⁴²

There were also growing problems in the south. Canadian analysis concluded that:

The extremist insurgency has sustained elevated levels of violence throughout the spring and summer months in the south and east including Kabul province...the intention of the enemy is to conduct attacks to disrupt elections process via indiscriminate attacks. The levels of violence witnessed throughout the summer are likely sustainable and likely to continue...⁴³

Humanitarian Taskings

With the successful completion of the Presidential Inauguration security operations in December 2004, the Canadian contingent maintained watch on the security ‘bubble’ around Camp Julien. The recce squadron group was called out on two occasions for non-traditional tasks. The first was a heavy snowfall in the Sarobi district, particularly in the passes. Fuel truck traffic ceased, with potentially negative effects on operations in Kabul. Coyote patrols assessed the situation and KMNB mobilized the Multinational Engineer Group to assist the Afghans with snow and ice control in the passes. On 4 February 2005, a Kam Air 737 flying from Herat to Kabul disappeared off the scopes. ISAF and CFC-A reconnaissance resources were re-tasked to look for the crash site. As U.S. Navy P-3s swept back and forth south of the city, TF Kabul readied two ad hoc Search and Rescue teams from the Health Support Services unit, the recce squadron group and the Slovenian reconnaissance unit. The wreck was found two days later southeast of Kabul and the Slovenes were inserted by helicopter to secure the site (the site was outside the ISAF area of operations, so Canadian units could not respond). The crash killed all 104 passengers and crew, which, as it turned out, was not a terrorist incident and attributed to poor weather conditions.⁴⁴

Operation ATHENA Roto 3: February-May 2005

Led by Col Walter Semianiw, Operation ATHENA Roto 3 became a ‘placeholder’ rotation while the Canadian government and the Canadian Forces determined the future course of action in Afghanistan. In that respect, Roto 3 basically conducted force protection for itself but was prepared to contribute to the same operational endeavours with KMNB that its predecessor organization had. Structurally, Roto 3 resembled Roto 2 though there was great high-level debate over whether the three infantry platoons should have a company headquarters or not.

TF Kabul HQ essentially applied new code words to old operations and carried on as before with counter-rocket deterrence tasks, route observation, and Camp Julien protection. Roto 3 staff reorganized and consolidated community outreach programmes into Operation ARREST (police training assistance), Operation AMNESTY (engineer and unexploded explosive ordnance removal), Operation ASCLEPIUS (medical outreach) and

Operation AMULET (CIMIC operations). These operations focused on PD 6 and PD 7 to influence the population in the immediate proximity to the facility. Unlike previous rotations, this rotation did not participate in any singular large event.

The All Source Intelligence Centre continued to support KMNB operations and continued to develop information exchanges with CFC-A which significantly assisted with planning for future operations in southern Afghanistan. On one occasion, a field security team gave chase to a suspected vehicle-borne IED disguised as a UN operations vehicle. Camp Julien was alerted to the threat but the vehicle disappeared in the city's maw before it could be stopped. The engineer squadron was put on alert on another occasion when floods were predicted following the spring melt. The main hotspot during Roto 3's tenure was Sarobi district, in which Recce Squadron supported the German battle group as it swept in for a series of cordon and searches with the police. An indication that things were heating up in Kabul came in March 2005 when a Canadian embassy vehicle was targeted unsuccessfully by an IED. The transition from the ETT to the Afghan National Training Centre (CA) detachment was also finalized during this rotation.⁴⁵ In May 2005, Operation ATHENA Roto 3 started the transition to TF Afghanistan.

ENDNOTES

1. "Commander's Presentation: Task Force Kabul, Rotation 2 August 2004-February 2005."
2. Interview with Colonel Jim Ellis and LCol Ross Nairne (Edmonton, 8 February 2010).
3. Ibid.
4. In the Cold War days, this was called 'Assault Troop' and was made up of armoured soldiers but assault troop had been removed from the order of battle to save money in the 1990s.
5. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
6. "Task Force Kabul Commander's Mid-Tour Report" (22 November 2004).
7. "Operation ATHENA Roto 2 End Tour Report: 9 August 2004-10 February 2005."
8. "Task Force Kabul Commander's Mid-Tour Report" (22 November 2004).
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
12. NCE SITREPs (4 September 2004) (17 September 2004); "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
13. NCE SITREPs (18 October 2004) (19 October 2004); "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005"; Author's observations on the ground in Kabul (December 2004).

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14. As described in Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
15. Ellis and Nairne interview.
16. Author's observations on the ground in Kabul (December 2004).
17. Ellis and Nairne interview.
18. Ibid.
19. The various reports by LCol George Petrolekas, the Canadian liaison officer at Brunssum, are quite blunt in this regard. See "Report of the Canadian LO to JFC Brunssum" (3 September 2004 and 11 October 2004). Petrolekas was, unfortunately, marginalized by unadventurous elements in Ottawa who resented his ability to provide them with information they did not want to hear.
20. Ellis and Nairne interview.
21. Hope telephone interview (1 December 2010).
22. CFC-A briefing to the author (Kabul, December 2004). See also David Barno, "Fighting the 'Other War' Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003-2005," *Military Review* (September-October 2007), pp. 32-44.
23. Task Force Victory briefing to the author (Kabul, December 2004). See also message Olexiuk to NDHQ (22 January 2004).
24. Cairnes to DCDS, "Operation ARCHER-Staff Positions and Embedded Training Team with Combined Forces Command Afghanistan HQ" (5 October 2004).
25. "Task Force Kabul Commander's Mid-Tour Report" (22 November 2004).
26. See Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*. See also email thread J3 International and NCE, "Op RAVEN" (28 December 2004).
27. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
28. BBC News, "Observers Approve Afghan Election" (10 October 2004). Golnaz Esfandiari, "Afghanistan: Karzai Calls On Taliban to Participate in Elections," (RFE/RL 27 April 2004).
29. "Report of the Canadian LO to JFC Brunssum" (11 October 2004).
30. Combat Studies Institute Operational Leadership Experiences interview series, Maj Deitra Korando (Leavenworth, KS, 5 October 2005).
31. Briefing to author, "Support to Presidential Elections" (Kabul December 2004); Daniele Roggio, "NATO's Role in the Stabilization Process of Afghanistan," in *The Future of Euro-Atlantic Security* (Rome, 1-3 December 2004).
32. The map is in the author's possession. See Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos* and NCE SITREP (18 October 2004).
33. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
34. Ibid.
35. NCE SITREP (9 October 2004); "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005." See also Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
36. NCE SITREP (3 October 2004).

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37. "Operation ATHENA Task Force Kabul National Command Element Change of Command Board of Inquiry between Col W.J. Ellis and Col W. Semianiw, 8 February 2005."
38. See Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos* and NCE SITREP (5 October 2004).
39. "Operation ATHENA Roto 2 End Tour Report: 9 August 2004-10 February 2005"; Ellis/Nairne interview.
40. CRS Report for Congress, Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections" (8 April 2005).
41. NCE SITREPs (17 January 2005) (31 January 2005).
42. NCE SITREP (17 January 2005).
43. Deployment Order Op ATHENA Roto 3 Tac Recce (7 October 2004).
44. Bashir Seiqy, "Rescuers Scour Afghan Plane Crash," *Turkish Weekly* (7 February 2005); NCE SITREP (3 February 2005) (4 February 2005).
45. NCE SITREPS (March-May 2005).

OPERATION ARGUS:

THE STRATEGIC ADVISORY TEAM-AFGHANISTAN, 2004-2006

The most critical item that emerged from Canada's tenure with NATO ISAF in Kabul in 2003 and 2004 was the recognition that there was a complete lack of a NATO strategy or even a unified approach for dealing with Afghanistan. Yes, there was the Bonn Agreement of 2001, yes, an Afghan document called "Rebuilding Our Nation" was released in 2002 and yes, a number of European nations agreed to work on certain development 'pillars.' However, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM was pursuing a variety of kinetic and non-kinetic initiatives, including security force capacity building, which could loosely be termed strategic in nature. In addition, a variety of national and international aid organizations wandered around the country in an uncoordinated fashion working on projects on a target of opportunity basis.

For the most part, these were operational and even tactical-level responses to the problems of Afghanistan. Nothing tied these efforts together and little of it had anything to do with the Afghan Transitional Administration. There was no federal government bureaucracy; it was a casualty of the Taliban's medieval approach to governance. NATO expansion was generally seen as a means to generate a singular international military command for the country and get local governors to link to Kabul, but that was not the long-term solution to the problems of Afghanistan, even though it was pursued with some vigour and was important in generating some unity of effort. Having a command did not necessarily mean, however, that there was a strategy to go along with it. For some, the command and control arrangements even became ends unto themselves.

This problem replicated itself in the Canadian context. Canada had established strategic objectives in November 2001 and re-confirmed them by the 2003 commitment process and the 2004 planning process to accept a PRT. However, there was still no coordinated Canadian strategic approach – it was as fragmented as the situation in Afghanistan was. Even though it had a small number of fine people in Afghanistan, institutionally CIDA did not really want to be involved with National Defence or the Canadian Forces or even with Afghanistan. Its focus tended to be Africa. No one in Canada seriously considered a policing component yet. Foreign Affairs had its factional splits over Canadian involvement in the country. The cooperative approach taken by MGen Andrew Leslie and ambassador Chris Alexander was an early and successful attempt at integration on the national front, which produced strategic and operational effects in Afghanistan through their ability to leverage allied money and Afghan behaviour.

This approach was personality-based, however, and as such had no ‘legs’ unless it was institutionalized somehow – and that was thwarted by a variety of interests, some of them in NATO. In 2004, LGen Hillier and his staff identified these factors as they led to Canada’s key role in mentoring and developing a strategy for Afghanistan. Ultimately, it also formed a more coordinated Canadian approach to the war in Afghanistan.

The Problems with Developing a Strategy for Afghanistan

On arrival in Kabul, Canadian planners who had experience with the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia wondered where ISAF’s multi-year road map (MYRM or ‘merm’) was. The MYRM, developed to solve the problem of agency coordination and resource allocation in Bosnia, was a synchronization matrix that separated stabilization and reconstruction activities into categories, established benchmarks to measure progress, put them all on a timeline and then assigned resources from the various international agencies. In effect, the MYRM was the strategy for Bosnian reconstruction; the Office of the High Representative (OHR) was the focal point of all international activity and even though the Stabilization Force created the MYRM, the OHR administered it.¹ NATO ISAF in Kabul had no MYRM. There was no real OHR equivalent either.

The Afghan Transitional Administration was a rough equivalent to the OHR, but with the 2004 federal elections upcoming, it was focused on becoming a legitimate, democratically elected government. That said, preliminary efforts to establish reconstruction programmes had taken place in 2003 and 2004.

First, there were the Europeans with their stovepiped plans for assisting the transitional administration. Italy was supposed to help with the judiciary, while the Germans had lead for police development. Britain held the counter-narcotics portfolio. The Americans had lead status for army development but it was administered through CFC-A’s TF Phoenix. There was little or no formal coordination between any of these activities.

At the same time, the re-created Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, under the tireless leadership of Dr. Ashraf Ghani, worked with the World Bank and a variety of donors to establish 12 National Priority Programs for the Afghan Transitional Administration. These programmes, which ranged from microfinance schemes to water and sanitation improvements, were an ambitious and comprehensive plan to repair Afghanistan after 25 years of war. Of these, the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was the best known and, ultimately, it would become important to Canada’s war in the south.

The NSP was designed to develop local governance and alleviate poverty at the community and district levels. One of the concepts the rural development ministry wanted to employ as part of the NSP was called the Community Development Council.² The idea was that the Community Development Council would work with another organization,

the Provincial Development Committee, and both in turn would interact with the governors to administer the NSP. This was all very embryonic and the UNAMA even opposed in part because they did not come up with the idea and could not exert any control over it. UNAMA wanted to establish regional offices at the provincial level to do essentially the same thing using UN resources and contract personnel, while Ghani and others wanted an Afghan-controlled system run by Afghans working for an Afghan government.³

The problem in 2004 was the ability and capacity of the Afghans to implement these ideas. There was a fledgling bureaucracy in Kabul, but none in any of the provinces. Connections to the provinces were only starting to be facilitated through the American-led PRTs in 2004, but in many cases the local governors had direct links to Karzai – and they used them. How the National Priority Programs and the NSP would coexist alongside the counterinsurgency effort and then fit into any country strategy or operational concept was unclear in 2004, but it would have to be sorted out. How well the planned Provincial Development Committees and Community Development Councils would interact with the governors, who had their own independent military forces, was even less certain.

At the same time, the new American Operation ENDURING FREEDOM command Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) developed its own approach to the development and counterinsurgency problems in late late 2003 and early 2004. CFC-A's objectives were to enable:⁴

1. the establishment of security and the rule of law;
2. good governance and democracy;
3. socio-economic development and reconstruction; and
4. engage at an international, regional and inter-agency level to achieve security goals and prepare Afghanistan for its continued role in the Global War on Terror.

CFC-A identified the centre of gravity as the Afghan people. Instead of the Bonn Agreement's pillars, CFC-A had its own:

1. defeat terrorism and deny sanctuary;
2. enable Afghan security structures;
3. sustain area ownership;

4. enable reconstruction and good governance; and
5. engage regional states.

The primary thrust of the CFC-A's thinking was to extend the reach of the Kabul government throughout the country in part to prepare for the 2004 national elections. This would give the Afghans a means to participate in the elections, and thus generate legitimacy. It would also strengthen the links between Kabul and the provinces. In turn, this would facilitate the delivery of security and reconstruction programmes, and especially the DDR and heavy weapons cantonment programmes, which up to this point had been limited to the Kabul area. In theory, the means to do all of this would primarily fall on the PRTs, which would evolve beyond their original configuration to handle more development and DDR capacity.⁵

Out of this emerged the Regional Development Zone idea. CFC-A planners envisioned an RDZ surrounding each PRT. Until the Afghan government could establish itself better in the provinces, the PRT would coordinate and work alongside the provincial governor, development agencies and non-governmental organizations to establish good governance, a judiciary system, an expansion of the police and army, and the fostering of aid delivery, reconstruction, economic growth and revenue generation in selected areas. Combat forces, special operations and conventional, would operate to secure the RDZs and stamp out any insurgent activity. Areas outside the RDZ would be dealt with once the provincial government was established and secure. Kandahar province was supposed to be the pilot RDZ sometime in 2005, with others to follow later.⁶

Canadian planners were confronted, then, with several separate, overlapping, and even competing ideas about how the international community and the Afghan government were approaching the problems of reconstructing the country. There were the 'Bonn Pillars'; there was a NATO Operation Plan, which was limited to Kabul operations but trying to evolve into something more; there were the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's reconstruction programmes; and there was the CFC-A strategy and the conceptual operational applications of it.

Conversations between President Karzai, Eileen Olexiuk and Chris Alexander from DFAIT, and LGen Rick Hillier produced an Afghan request for a number of Canadian planners to help Ashraf Ghani (now Minister of Finance) develop a coordination plan for national development. One of the main issues was the need to meet World Bank requirements so that Afghanistan could access World Bank financial resources for reconstruction. That meant that a plan had to be in place and it had to be transparent and workable. If there were no plan, there would be no certification and therefore no reconstruction money. It was literally that simple.⁷

LCol Ian Hope, LCol Kevin Moore and Maj Howard Coombs, who were in ISAF HQ in the CJ-9 (CIMIC-joint) shop, were sent to work with Ghani's staff by June 2004. Throughout 2004, the Canadian planners conducted a centre of gravity analysis of the situation. Success in Afghanistan was confronted with substantial obstructions on all fronts: social, political, military and economic. These obstacles interfered with the creation of a legitimate and credible government.⁸

While the Afghan Transitional Administration was preparing for the 2004 elections, there were several competing powers outside Kabul. These were mostly centred on the main power brokers discussed in earlier chapters: Dostum, Fahim, Sayyaf, Rabbani, Khalili and Ismael Khan in the north and west. In the east, Pacha Khan Zadran was the primary power broker. In the south, the Sherzai family and the Kandahar Justice Assembly dominated Kandahar province, while an unknown collection of irregular forces were in charge in Helmand.⁹

The analysts believed that there were, in fact, five identifiable and separate economic systems in Afghanistan. Dostum was involved in gas, textiles and agriculture. Fahim handled emeralds, Lapis Lazuli gemstones, and timber. Sayyaf and the Sherzai clan were into money and household items. Ismael Khan cornered the market in textiles and agriculture. All five were involved in the opium and weapons trades.¹⁰

The question the planners asked was this: was Afghanistan's future model similar to Colombia or Somalia, on one hand, or Thailand, Ghana, Peru or El Salvador on the other? To shift the balance, the focus of any future national plan had to compete with, and undermine, the illicit economies. The proposed methodology worked out in the fall and winter of 2004 suggested a scope of operations that focused on the district level:

Select districts to receive intensive development packages using the combined effects of the [National Priority Programs], [Afghanistan Stabilisation Program], NSP, [National Emergency Employment Programme], [Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan], PRT, and RDZ as part of a National District "Clean up" Certification Programme. The criteria for selection and certification will be cooperation in security efforts, law and order, poppy cultivation and economic potential.¹¹

The next move was to link these district economies to the urban economy via a reconstructed national transportation road network, followed by establishing "national control over all major border crossing sites and begin to secure revenue from tariffs."¹² This all presumed that the Afghan National Army and police grew proportionally and that DDR and weapons cantonment programmes continued outside Kabul to undermine power broker militias (it is also important to note here that the insurgency that later confronted Afghanistan did not yet exist as a serious challenge to development).

The main products that emerged from the Canadian planning process were the Investment Management Framework and the Operational Road Map. Essentially, the Framework and the road map were like the MYRM from Bosnia but heavily modified to conform to Afghan circumstances. They established categories, benchmarks, and effectiveness criteria for security, governance and development; they were comprehensive and it was the only option that anyone could or would generate to get a grip on coordinating the myriad of agencies operating in Afghanistan and couple them to a common way forward.¹³ (See Figures 7-1 and 7-2)

When LGen Hillier went to present the Investment Management Framework and Operational Road Map to the NATO Joint Forces Command HQ in Brunssum, however, he ran into a brick wall. General Gerhard Back, a Cold War Luftwaffe fighter pilot, did not want ISAF to have anything to do with development in Afghanistan and told Hillier in a nasty exchange during a teleconference that ISAF was there for security only and to stay inside his box. This limited view coming from a German general was stunning, given Germany's role with taking the pilot NATO PRT in Konduz. Try as he might, Hillier could not get NATO to accept any form of responsibility for coordination, or even assistance. There were suspicions in the Canadian camp that elements in NATO were trying to distance themselves from Afghanistan and that the Brunssum headquarters was being used as a mechanism to do so. Even SACEUR, General James Jones, could not get General Back to cooperate. When Eurocorps took over command of ISAF from Hillier in late summer 2004, the Investment Management Framework and Operational Road Map were allowed to die. French Lt Gen Jean Louis Py¹⁴ did not really want anything to do with the project either.¹⁵

That approach was problematic. NATO was expanding, or planning to expand, throughout Afghanistan, with PRTs but it had no strategy to integrate them or any other NATO activity with Afghan national development or with CFC-A's security operations. By choice. Combined with the lack of serious movement on the policing and judiciary fronts by the Germans and Italians between 2002 and 2005, the decision by a German general and a French general to scuttle the creation of a national strategy for Afghanistan should rank as one of the most serious setbacks inflicted on the international effort to stabilize Afghanistan. It certainly demonstrated the limits of Canadian influence in NATO circles and clearly drove LGen Hillier, who was about to become the CDS, to work much more closely with the Americans and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM instead of the European-dominated NATO ISAF.

Indeed, the Investment Management Framework and Operational Road Map were briefed to Pentagon planners in December 2004. Conceptually, they were absorbed into American thinking on Afghanistan but as the Americans were planning to reduce their forces in favour of an expanded ISAF, it did not take root in those venues.¹⁶

STRUCTURED PROCESS FOR THE HARMONISED DEVELOPMENT OF AFGHANISTAN (SPDA)

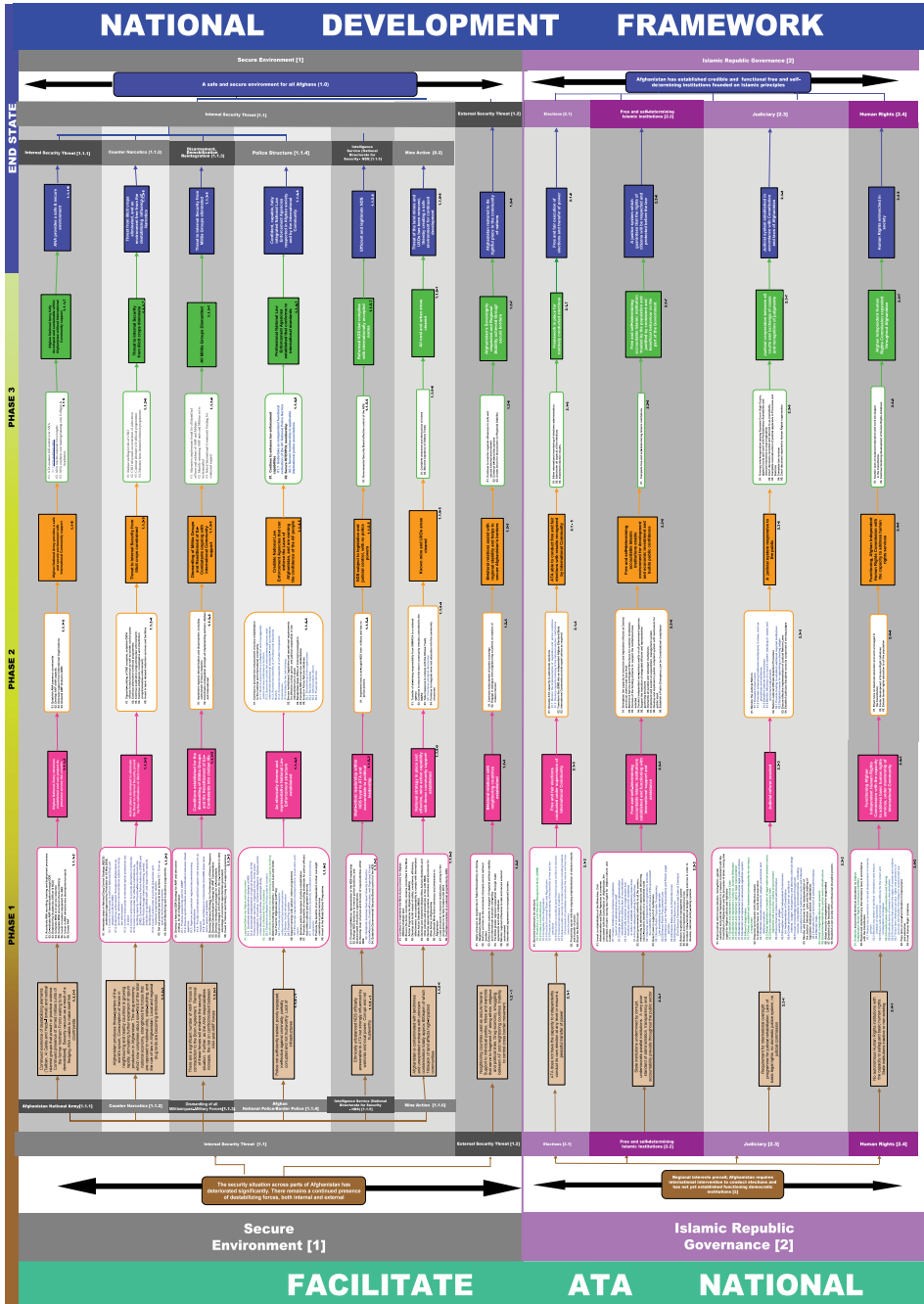


Figure 7-1: The Investment Management Framework

JFC/ISAF OPERATIONAL ROAD MAP (ORM) – Mission Overview

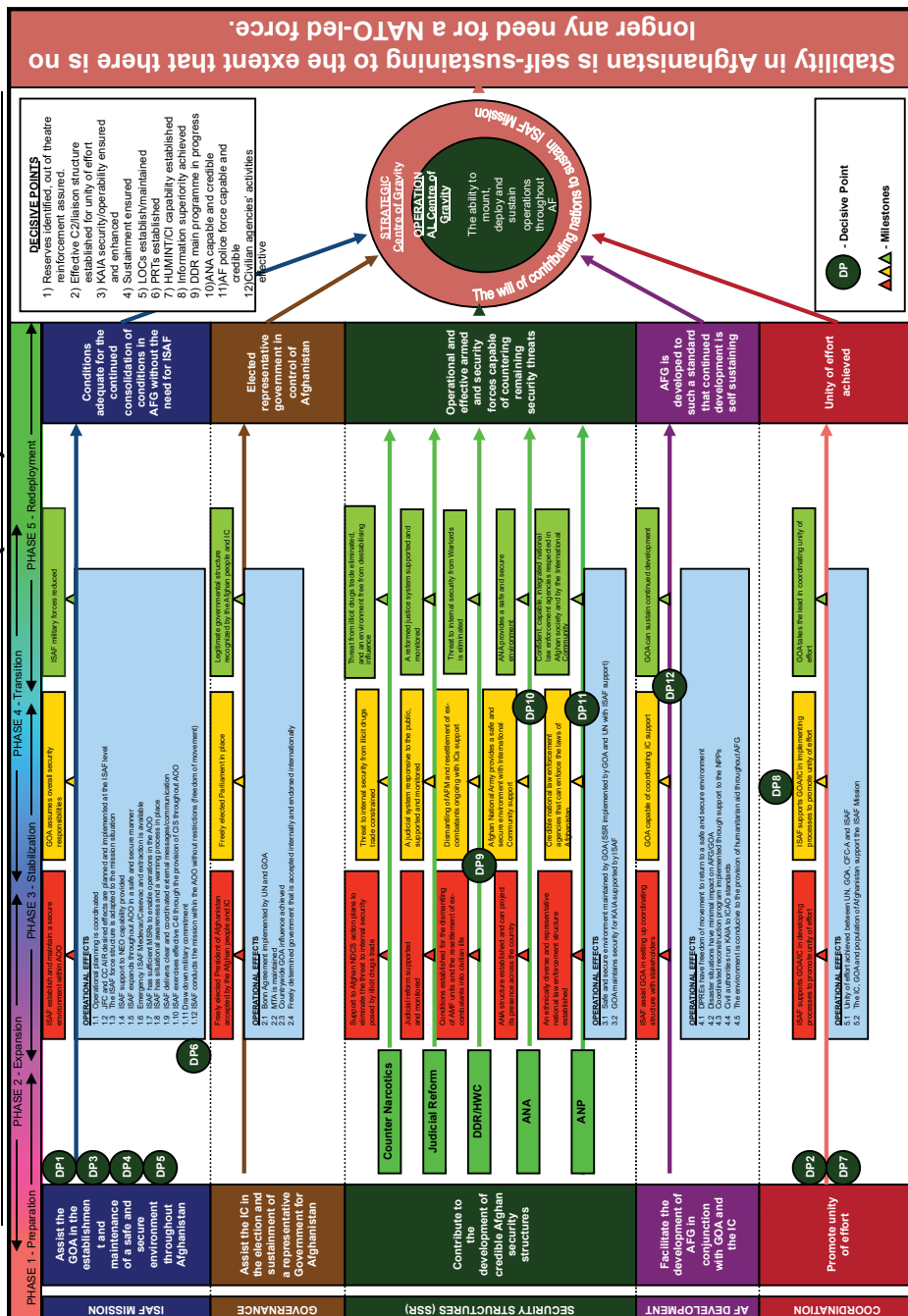


Figure 7-2: The Operational Road Map

Enter the Afghans. Ashraf Ghani approached Hillier in the spring of 2005 and asked if Canada would send a planning staff on a more permanent basis to help again. As it turned out, NATO remained uninterested and CFC-A planners retained an operational-level focus. Ghani liked the Investment Management Framework approach and thought it was the right direction to go, but his staff needed mentoring in developing it further. At the same time, the idea that the international community should commit in writing to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, in order to avoid a repeat of the post-Soviet era, also emerged. A group of ambassadors, with Chris Alexander among them representing Canada, thought there should be a document that linked both Afghan efforts and an international commitment. In time, this document would be called the Afghanistan Compact. Consequently, Ghani needed help with a new framework and with the Compact.¹⁷

After consultation with ambassador Chris Alexander and Nipa Bannerjee, the CIDA head of development at the embassy, Hillier took the idea of a Canadian advisory team back to Ottawa where it encountered opposition from the middle-level management of Foreign Affairs who, in the words of one observer, “were wrestling with the rational, arguing with the rational” and claimed they hadn’t been informed. When confronted with message traffic saying they had been, they remained reticent because “[SAT-A] wasn’t invented there.” Hillier held an interdepartmental meeting with Foreign Affairs, CIDA, the RCMP and DND. These principles came away from the meeting in an enthusiastic frame of mind and CIDA offered a contract development worker or ‘co-operant’ to the team. Elements in Foreign Affairs remained difficult; it took Peter Harder, the deputy minister, to force the middle-level opponents to back down. These people viewed the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan (SAT-A) with some alarm because they did not come up with the idea and they could not control it.¹⁸ Parenthetically, this became the basis for the future destruction of SAT-A by internal Canadian bureaucratic forces.

Col Mike Capstick and a group of hand-picked planners arrived in Kabul in the summer of 2005 to form Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan. This was dubbed Operation ARGUS.

It is important to note here, before delving into SAT-A activities, that by this time Hillier and the people surrounding him were becoming more and more attuned to the problems of interagency coordination and strategy not only in an alliance sense but also in a Canadian sense. Strategically, the rehabilitation of Afghanistan, in order to prevent it from becoming an Al Qaeda safe haven again, meant that rural development and security for that effort had to be integrated and coordinated. Canada could play a lead role in facilitating that coordination but to do so, Canada had to lead by example and demonstrate to the Afghans that Canada was willing to put its money and people where its mouth was. A handful of advisors were not salient enough.

At the same time, having SAT-A assist with creating the ‘funnel’ for the reconstruction monies in Kabul wouldn’t allow Canada to monitor what was coming out of the ‘spout’ at the other end in the provinces. Taking a PRT would permit Canada a window into the practical application of the development strategy and, in theory, a feedback loop could develop whereby inputs from the PRT could be fed to SAT-A and the plan adjusted by the Afghans. However, none of this was explicitly stated at the time. Canada already agreed to a PRT before SAT-A came along, but having the two in place had potential synergy. This could, again in theory, be leveraged by Canada in various halls of power in Kabul, Brussels, New York and Washington. Whether anyone, DFAIT or any other Canadian entity involved in foreign policy, saw the value in this at the time remains open to question. Certainly, there were visionaries in the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence that did.

The idea of having a Canadian battle group and special operations forces re-committed to Afghanistan paralleled all of this. The Canadian Army’s operational pause was going to end in January 2006, which made a battle group available for operations, somewhere. Since Canada was going into Kandahar, and Kandahar was dicey from a security standpoint, having a battle group and special operations forces on hand to shield any PRT development efforts was a prudent idea given the state of affairs as they unfolded throughout 2005. The idea of a battle group in addition to a PRT commitment emerged by March 2005.¹⁹

Having SAT-A, ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM HQ staff, military trainers and the embassy in Kabul, and then having a PRT, a battle group, and special operations forces in Kandahar, was a potent vertically integrated force. It would allow Canada access to all aspects of Afghanistan security, reconstruction and development, which would improve Canada’s ability to understand the situation in Afghanistan and adjust to it so Canadian national objectives could be met in denying Afghanistan to Al Qaeda and its allies. Again, the whole package could be leveraged with the Americans and NATO. Nothing like this had been attempted before in Canadian military history and certainly Canadian Army leaders never had this high level of influence during any previous conflict in its history.

Operation ARGUS: Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan

Ensnared in SAT House behind the Canadian embassy complex in Kabul, the 17-man and woman SAT-A under Col Mike Capstick went to work in August 2005. Functionally, there were two planning teams, A and B; a policy analyst, a CIDA advisor, a strategic communications specialist and support staff, plus interpreters. The SAT-A planners lived in SAT House but worked in civilian clothes alongside their Afghan counterparts in the ministries around Kabul. SAT-A had its own armoured sport utility vehicles and, as its members were mostly military personnel, SAT-A handled its own point-to-point security.

It is important to note that SAT-A was a bilateral operation between Canada and Afghanistan. It did not belong to ISAF, nor did it belong to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. It was a purely self-contained Canadian initiative designed to address a particularly significant gap in the international community's involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Credibility with the Afghans was paramount. There was to be no national monetary agenda in the way that CIDA operated elsewhere in the Third World, that is, SAT-A was not to engage in preferentially directing Afghan reconstruction aid monies through Canadian development entities, corporations and contractors; other nations were doing that, and the Afghans knew it and resented it. SAT-A would not indulge in that behaviour, though there was pressure from some quarters to do so.²⁰



Photo Credit: Author

Col Mike Capstick initially led the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan. This relatively small but capable group worked closely with the Afghan government in the formulation of the Afghan National Development Strategy, a document that was a vital stage in gaining international reconstruction monies for Afghanistan.

In 2005-2006, SAT-A was involved in five main activities. The main effort was the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), in this case, the interim version of it, the I-ANDS. One team worked with Dr. Ishaq Nadiri, the Senior Economic Advisor to the President. Nadiri developed strong relationships with the head of aid at the Canadian embassy, Nipa Bannerjee, who at the time was trying to get CIDA in Ottawa to understand the coordination problem that existed in Kabul. CIDA, however, was constrained by the culture of its long-term programming processes and was incapable of reacting in a timely fashion to Bannerjee's concerns. She only had one other person in Kabul, Christina Green

from CIDA. Nadiri asked Bannerjee to head the External Advisory Group (EAG), which consisted of all eleven potential donors that would feed the ANDS with monies once it was established. Bannerjee and Green were overwhelmed; this wasn't a CIDA task, but there was nobody else to do it and consequently, Bannerjee asked SAT-A to assist with basic capacity building with the EAG staff – how to run a meeting, prepare slides, put out an agenda. That involvement expanded when Nadiri asked Capstick to help the Afghan staff understand synchronization and other planning tools, tools that would be directly applied to the I-ANDS as it evolved in various draft forms throughout late 2005 in the run-up to the planned 2006 London Conference.²¹

The most important work undertaken by SAT-A was the ANDS in both its interim and final versions, and the Afghanistan Compact. The ANDS would evolve from the interim version once all the kinks were worked out. On arrival in August 2005, SAT-A supported the ANDS Working Group as a priority task. Given that the planned \$10 billion dollars would not be made available for Afghanistan reconstruction without a plan and without a serious commitment by the principle players, the imperative to get the plan right the first time was paramount.

The politics surrounding the role of the EAG in the I-ANDS process are beyond detailed recounting here. For the first time since the Bonn Agreement of 2001, there was some form of cohesion within the donor community. In effect, one of the main problems revolved around the personalities from the UN, who wanted control of everything and behaved “arrogantly” with a “first among equals” attitude. The UN was not generally trusted by Afghans for historical reasons dating back to the early 1990s. The EAG in one sense served as a sort of buffer to keep the UN included but not in control while at the same time giving other donors a means to voice their concerns: “get the donors in line before too much ink is spilled.”²² Keep in mind that if there was no plan, the donors would not invest in Afghanistan reconstruction. If there were no investment monies, then nothing would get done on a programme level in the provinces and the communities.²³

Another area SAT-A worked in was the National Programme Support Office. The rural rehabilitation ministry's twelve programmes as established in 2004 were in trouble. The National Programme Support Office was a CIDA/USAID initiative to assist with quality control, troubleshooting, and coordination for the National Priority Program's 12 initiatives. The intent was “to take 15, 20, 25 or whatever number of the most screwed up development projects in the country and give them some support.”²⁴ When the Canadian planners arrived and assessed what was going on, they discovered that only 23% of the reconstruction monies allocated to these programmes could be spent because of the lack of programme management skills within the various programmes' staff. After preliminary work at establishing an outline plan and requirements between the SAT-A team and the staff, a contractor was brought in to expand those skills sets.²⁵

That got SAT-A more interested in capacity-building for the whole Afghan government. Could SAT-A have a role to play in helping the Civil Service Commission develop *its* capacity to produce bureaucrats? A SAT-A team moved in there to assess and assist as much as it could. There was, it turned out, no coherent strategy to establish and create a civil service. This was astounding. Here it was, four years into the Afghan reconstruction process, and nobody in the international community had focused on the basics of setting up a government. Once again, SAT-A conducted a recce to see how big the problem was and get a working group established to address it; this evolved into what became over time the problematic Public Administration Reform Strategy that bedeviled everybody for years as the Afghans tried to steer a course between dependence on international contractors and capacity building. As it turned out, the main problems included the fact that “there’s nothing that resembles a human resource management system, there are big gobs of civil servants whose ideas are rooted in the Communist era with a central planning micro-managerial way of doing business.... the more rubber stamps you have, the better off you are.” And these people were elderly – the Taliban had no bureaucracy, so the next generation of Afghan bureaucrats were coming from the expatriate community and then there were personality conflicts between those who stayed and those who left. It was, according to Col Mike Capstick “a nightmare.”²⁶

SAT-A worked closely with the Afghan government on another area: strategic communications. Mentoring processes and creating programmes was one thing, explaining them to the extremely diverse international community organizations both in Kabul and outside the country was a serious challenge. In effect, the Afghans had to learn the new language of the 21st century media and how it worked for and against the Afghan government’s agendas. Indeed, one of the most important successes was the creation of a strategic communications advisory group, which brought representatives from UNAMA, ISAF, CFC-A, and selected embassy spokesmen together to assist with those problems. SAT-A worked behind the scenes to get this to happen and left no fingerprints. There were other examples like this that were quietly facilitated over beers next to the fire pit at the SAT House. As it was not an embassy, a lot of informal facilitation could take place that could not have safely taken place in other venues or with visible representatives of national governments.²⁷

SAT-A plunged in anyway and worked tirelessly in what was a high-threat environment. Kabul was not safe and secure. It was, at that time in 2005–2006, as dangerous as Kandahar was. There were daily threat warnings on IED and suicide IED activity. There were random rocket attacks. Bombs went off regularly. Government offices, of course, were prime targets as were nearly all international military personnel. In 2006, there was severe rioting when an American patrol accidentally shot some citizens; then there were the “Danish cartoon” riots of equal severity. This was building a national government while under fire.

No other Canadian government organization was in a better position to assist the Afghan government than SAT-A; certainly, no other country outside the United States had developed that level of credibility within the Karzai government at this time in 2005–2006. This credibility was based on the personal relations of the 17 people who shared the dangers and worked day in, day out, alongside their Afghan counterparts in those key government ministries involved in the planning process.

One of the imperatives was that the Bonn Agreement of 2001 was set to expire with the provincial elections of 2005. Bonn needed to be replaced. The Afghanistan Compact was the commitment and the I-ANDS was the plan. The ANDS would evolve from the interim version once all the kinks were worked out. On arrival in August 2005, SAT-A supported the ANDS Working Group as a priority task. Ambassador Chris Alexander was already in the lead in the development of the Compact, which would replace the Bonn framework commitment document. There were other players, like Barney Rubin from the United States, who played a role in the drafting process. SAT-A helped Ambassador Alexander “scribe” the drafts of the Compact and the I-ANDS and coordinated them with other drafts. At the same time, SAT-A worked with Nipa Bannerjee supporting her in the External Advisory Group.²⁸



Photo Credit: Author

The Strategic Advisory Team house was adjacent to the Canadian embassy in Kabul. The fire pit and beer fridge reputedly contributed to generating more Canadian influence in Kabul than formal diplomatic methodology.

The Afghanistan Compact established several principles of cooperation:²⁹

1. Respect the pluralistic culture, values and history of Afghanistan, based on Islam;
2. Work on the basis of partnership between the Afghan Government, with its sovereign responsibilities, and the international community, with a central and impartial coordinating role for the UN;
3. Engage further the deep-seated traditions of participation and aspiration to ownership of the Afghan people;
4. Pursue fiscal, institutional and environmental sustainability;
5. Build lasting Afghan capacity and effective state and civil society institutions, with particular emphasis on building up human capacities of men and women alike;
6. Ensure balanced and fair allocation of domestic and international resources in order to offer all parts of the country tangible prospects of well-being;
7. Recognize in all policies and programmes that men and women have equal rights and responsibilities;
8. Promote regional cooperation; and
9. Combat corruption and ensure public transparency and accountability.

All parties were committed to establishing security:

Genuine security remains a fundamental prerequisite for achieving stability and development in Afghanistan. Security cannot be provided by military means alone. It requires good governance, justice and the rule of law, reinforced by reconstruction and development. With the support of the international community, the Afghan Government will consolidate peace by disbanding all illegal armed groups. The Afghan Government and the international community will create a secure environment by strengthening Afghan institutions to meet the security needs of the country in a fiscally sustainable manner.

To that end, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and partner nations involved in security sector reform will continue to provide strong support to the Afghan Government in establishing and sustaining security and stability in Afghanistan, subject to participating states' national approval procedures. They will continue to strengthen and develop the capacity of the national security forces to ensure that they become fully functional. All OEF counter-terrorism operations will be conducted in close coordination with the Afghan Government and ISAF. ISAF will continue to expand its presence throughout Afghanistan, including through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and will continue to promote stability and support security sector reforms in its areas of operation.

Governance was to be a priority:

Democratic governance and the protection of human rights constitute the cornerstone of sustainable political progress in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government will rapidly expand its capacity to provide basic services to the population throughout the country. It will recruit competent and credible professionals to public service on the basis of merit; establish a more effective, accountable and transparent administration at all levels of Government; and implement measurable improvements in fighting corruption, upholding justice and the rule of law and promoting respect for the human rights of all Afghans.

The Afghan Government will give priority to the coordinated establishment in each province of functional institutions – including civil administration, police, prisons and judiciary. These institutions will have appropriate legal frameworks and appointment procedures; trained staff; and adequate remuneration, infrastructure and auditing capacity. The Government will establish a fiscally and institutionally sustainable administration for future elections under the supervision of the Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission.

Economic and Social development would be based on six sectors:

- Infrastructure and natural resources;
- Education;
- Health;

- Agriculture and rural development;
- Social protection; and
- Economic governance and private sector development.

Counter-narcotics received special mention:

Meeting the threat that the narcotics industry poses to national, regional and international security as well as the development and governance of the country and the well-being of Afghans will be a priority for the Government and the international community. The aim will be to achieve a sustained and significant reduction in the production and trafficking of narcotics with a view to complete elimination.

The heart of the I-ANDS looked identical to the MYRM from Bosnia. It had a synchronization matrix that depicted the “pillars”: Security, Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights; and Economic and Social Development. Each pillar had a “sector” or “sectors”; in the case of the I-ANDS, security was a sector and a pillar, but pillar 3 had sectors 3 to 8, or infrastructure to social protection. Each sector had several programmes. The planners had also developed five “cross cutting themes”: gender equity, counter-narcotics, regional cooperation, anti-corruption and environment. These themes were to be part of any plan developed by the sectors/pillars. The themes, as depicted, supported the pillars in the diagram.³⁰ (See Figure 7-3)

All Afghan government programmes had to fit within this framework, so the I-ANDS acted as a prioritization tool. The I-ANDS was geared toward five-year goals. Since it was a living document, there were expansion joints for 10- and 15-year benchmarks. Examining the whole I-ANDS is problematic here but the security ‘pillar’ is a good example of how the plan broke out. There were National Defence, Internal Security and Law Enforcement, DIAG, and de-mining programmes. All had a five-year or earlier benchmark: by Jaddi 1389 (the end of 2010) the Afghan National Army was to have 70 000 personnel trained, equipped and capable of meeting the security needs of the country. It was to be ethnically balanced. All illegally armed groups were to be disbanded by Jaddi 1386 (2007). As for de-mining, 70% of all stockpiled mines were to be destroyed by the same period. Each programme had to have a plan to meet the goal – and each programme had to be assigned to a ministry.³¹

The principle players in London accepted the Afghanistan Compact and the I-ANDS in February 2006, which served as the conceptual basis for development and security activities, and in turn formed the background for the development activities that the Canadian Army would be involved with in Kandahar province over the next five years.

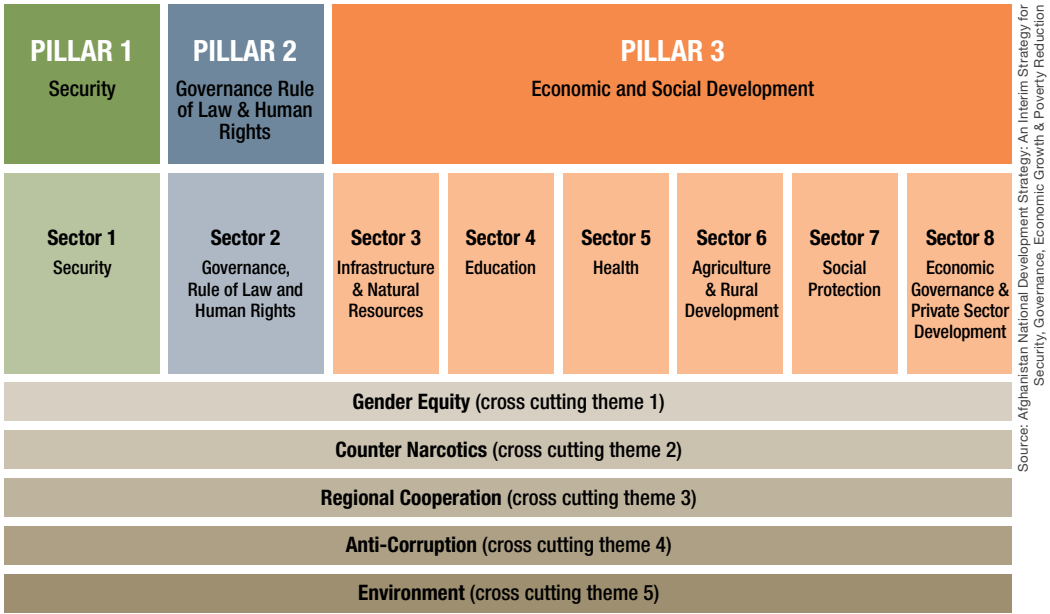


Figure 7-3: The Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy

The question that must be answered some day is: why, with all of its experience in Bosnia and Kosovo, NATO jettisoned responsibility and, for nearly two critical years from late 2003 and well into 2005, actively refused to assist in the creation of a strategic plan for Afghanistan after the requirement had been identified by Canadian general officers, diplomats and development personnel – not passively but actively, while NATO was pushing for expansion of its mandate and the deployment of more and PRTs?

And where were the Americans? The State Department was aware of SAT-A elements and expressed envy at SAT-A’s position and even conveyed this to SAT-A personnel, but did not attempt to supplant or undermine its activities. In this case, Canadian and American objectives were similar and SAT-A was having positive effects, so why interfere with it? It was unfathomable to some SAT-A personnel that Canada was able to be so adroit, exert so much influence, and fill so many voids during this critical time. At the same time, the access and successes that SAT-A enjoyed in 2005–2006 generated significant internal Canadian bureaucratic jealousies which would in time lead to its premature demise. That said, the ‘funnel’ was in the process of getting into place for reconstruction monies. But what about the provincial-level ‘spout,’ the PRTs?

ENDNOTES

1. SFOR and OHR briefings to the author (Bosnia, June-July 2001, and August 2004).
2. Briefing to the author, "National Solidarity Programme-An Overview" (Kabul, December 2004). See also "National Solidarity Programme Disburses First Grants to 14 Afghan Communities," *Voices*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (December 2003); Sultan Barakat, "Mid-term Evaluation Report of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), Afghanistan, May 2006," MRRD-NSP, Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unity (University of York, May 2006).
3. Interview with Nipa Bannerjee and Andy Tamas (Kabul, December 2005).
4. CFC-A briefing to the author (Kabul, December 2004).
5. Ibid.
6. TF Victory briefing (December 2004).
7. Interview with Col Mike Capstick (Kabul, 29 December 2005).
8. Maj Kathy Amponin and LCol Ian Hope, "Strategic Assessment for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan." (October 2004) (December 2004). Note: This briefing deck was based on the initial work conducted by the three Canadian officers earlier in 2004.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Briefing to the author, "The Investment Management Framework and the JFC Operational Road Map" (Kabul, December 2004), and contemporaneous discussions with the Canadian participants in the process.
14. On 7 August 2004: General Jean-Louis Py, commander of Eurocorps took command of ISAF.
15. Telephone interview with LCol Ian Hope (17 February 10). See also Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*, pp. 114-117.
16. Ibid.
17. Interview with Col Mike Capstick (Kabul, 29 December 2005).
18. Interview with Col Mike Capstick (Kabul, 29 December 2005); Hillier, *A Soldier First*, p. 424.
19. Telephone interview with LCol Ian Hope (17 February 10).
20. Author's observations (Kabul, December 2005), and discussions with SAT-A personnel.
21. Capstick interview; Interviews with LCol Christian Drouin and Major James Mackay (Kabul December 2005); Bannerjee and Tamas interview.
22. Capstick interview.
23. Interviews with LCol Christian Drouin and Major James Mackay (Kabul December 2005).
24. Capstick interview.
25. Capstick, Drouin, and Mackay interviews.
26. Capstick interview.

CHAPTER SEVEN

27. Discussions with the author (Kabul, July 2006).
28. Discussions with SAT-A personnel (Kabul, July 2006).
29. Drawn from the Afghanistan Compact document.
30. As described in Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*, pp. 114-122.
31. Ibid.

THE ROAD BACK TO KANDAHAR: THE CANADIAN ARMY RE-COMMITS TO OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, 2003-2005

The Overall Situation in 2003-2004

The departure of the Canadian Army from Kandahar in November 2002 reduced situational awareness in that area and there was no apparent requirement to consider the possibility that Canadian troops would be re-introduced there. From 2002 to 2003, however, residual insurgent activity directed at the interim administration and its coalition supporters remained. For example, reports came in that Afghan tribes in the south would be paid to fight for the Taliban by elements in Pakistan, with the first ‘Pakistani’ Taliban cells identified by analysts in July 2002.¹ Sometime in October 2002, Mullah Omar instructed madrassas in Pakistan who were loyal to him to recruit small groups of young men to be sent into each Afghanistan province to lay the groundwork for the anti-government effort.² The following month, a U.S. Army intelligence team working with local militia forces thwarted an assassination plot against Hamid Karzai in Kandahar City.³

The remnants of Al Qaeda’s conventional forces and survivors of the training camp network were reorganized inside Pakistan. They were directed to attack government and coalition facilities in Paktia, Paktika, and Khost. Al Qaeda cells continued to destabilize the tribal situation in Khost.⁴ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s reconstituted HiG organization, operating from bases in Pakistan, mounted urban terrorist operations in Kabul.⁵

It should also be noted that on the international front, Al Qaeda unsuccessfully attempted to lash out in response to operations in Afghanistan. An Al Qaeda plan to commit mass murder against the families of American special operations forces was uncovered. And, closer to home, an Al Qaeda plot to attack and sink HMCS *Montréal* was thwarted.⁶

It was increasingly clear in coalition circles throughout 2003 that these were not all discrete, disconnected activities. At some point in September 2003, there were reports that Mullah Omar established a committee to combat the interim and transitional administrations. Dubbed the Quetta Shura, the organization consisted of four committees: military, political, cultural and economic.⁷ Al Qaeda was represented in the new organization but there remained some friction between the shura’s personalities over the role of Mullah Omar, who was seen by some to have “lost” Afghanistan.⁸ That said, a mass distribution of audio cassettes was noted with Omar calling for attacks against the government and the international community efforts in southern Afghanistan.⁹

Canada and ISAF Expansion: The Early Days of 2003

Three months after Operation ATHENA launched in 2003, planning commenced on committing Canada to an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT. At that time, Canada was looking to remain committed to Afghanistan after it had relinquished command of ISAF in 2004 and involvement in a PRT was seen as part of an exit strategy from Kabul – before any Canadian forces even landed in Kabul. Once the Kabul mission was up and running, however, the urgent push for NATO expansion in Afghanistan in the fall of 2003 was felt by the senior Canadians on the ground, particularly MGen Andrew Leslie, DComd ISAF. As he put it, “Amongst UNAMA and certain diplomatic leaders it is becoming fairly clear that they believe the ATA under President Karzai may not survive, politically or physically, unless ISAF expands across the entirety of Afghanistan.”¹⁰

With Karzai in the lead, and with the support of UNAMA, elements in the non-governmental organizations community and even local power brokers, there were more and more requests on all fronts to expand the ISAF area of operations or to combine ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM under NATO leadership. At the same time, American representatives asked Canada to commit to a PRT. MGen Leslie was cautious as Canada was fully committed to Kabul:

We are doing more than enough already in terms of our national commitment, and the PRTs are open-ended endeavours.....once the aid starts arriving this may attract warlords/bandits eager to share in the wealth and cause an outcry for more security. Within a short time one could have an infantry company or battle group permanently deployed in Afghanistan, far away from Kabul.¹¹

A PRT commitment, however, was a useful way to handle what could be an abrupt shift after Canada relinquished command of ISAF. If no one came to take the job after Canada, ISAF might collapse. Committing to a PRT would ensure that Canada was covered, that Canada was not abandoning Afghanistan. There were concerns that “Pulling out of ISAF without adequate replacements could lead to a collapse of the ATA and the entire country would be back at square one.”¹²

The problem was that no one wanted to take ISAF as a lead nation after Canada. As a result, altering the commitment to a traditional NATO headquarters instead of a lead-nation headquarters, became a Canadian strategic priority. NATO expansion became a mechanism to involve the whole alliance, not just a handful of countries that had certain capabilities. The expansion issue remained “incoherent” into September 2003, but the idea that a PRT commitment could “give maximum exposure and value for minimal troop contributions” took hold in Canadian circles.¹³

At the same time,

The pressure from Mr. Brahimi, Mr. Annan, President Karzai, a veritable herd of local ambassadors and the U.S. (who has a vested interest in getting ISAF to take over the PRT constructs and to help with the entirety of the country, not just Kabul) as well as about every IO, NGO and UN organization, is now approaching a tilt point. To expand ISAF to include responsibility for the management of the PRTs and to provide [command and control and communications] for Kabul is too nice a fit for the many special interest groups to pass up. NATO is keen to show it is relevant, SACEUR (a U.S. officer) is keen to take the pressure off of the hard-pressed CENTCOM forces, and some nations have said they will not take the PRTs under CJTF 180 command (France and Germany, apparently). The killing role of CJTF 180 is not a nice fit with the PRTs and causes the internationals a lot of angst in terms of not willing to be associated with them (though they are very grateful for the security umbrella they provide).¹⁴

NATO-led ISAF was going to expand, period. What was Canada going to do next to stay in the game? That left the PRT option. However, there was now a problem, as DComd ISAF reported home: “the safest ones are getting snapped up quite quickly, and within a couple of months only the wild and woolly places will be left from which to choose.” The Americans were probing Canada about taking the Jalalabad PRT and it was a real possibility as it was close to Kabul and the Kabul International Airport logistics air head: “this might cost us a small rifle company...and some civilian police/CIDA/DFAIT/[International Organizations] personnel.”¹⁵ When there was no coherent reply from Ottawa to the Canadian principles in Kabul, MGen Leslie urgently suggested some thought be given to the situation:

I recommend we think through, very quickly, how we want to extricate our forces or at least downsize as of August 2004. If PRTs form part of that strategy then we need to start sending tentative signals to that effect. The NDHQ PRT recce team is a very good idea. Sooner, rather than later. My fear is we might end up with Kandahar or something equally unpleasant.¹⁶

In September 2003, the Chief of Staff for operations at DCDS was instructed to plan to deploy a “PRT investigation team” to informally discuss matters with United States planners at CJTF-180. At this point, CJTF-180 was the division-level headquarters for conventional Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces in Afghanistan and was in charge of the PRT file. The DCDS wanted two things: he wanted to know what exactly PRTs were and how they fit into what was happening in Afghanistan; and he informally wanted to ask what Canadian Forces contribution could be made to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM operations.¹⁷

The planners were, in effect, keeping options open. The Canadian government might want to use a PRT commitment to exit from Kabul; it might want to do both the Kabul mission and a PRT. In any event, anticipatory planning had to be conducted without making firm commitments.

Back in the ISAF arena, PRTs were being snapped up. The French were, apparently, interested in Herat. The New Zealanders wanted Bamiyan, while Germany wanted Konduz. Mazar-e Sharif was the British target, while the United States and Italy were planning to share Gardez. Parwan was for the taking, as was Kandahar and Jalalabad. As MGen Leslie reported to Ottawa, “Our intent is to keep your options open as the national authority. Should we decide to support the PRT route, we do not want to be backed into what might be an unpleasant PRT location such as Kandahar (which the United States is very keen to unload on any unsuspecting friend).”¹⁸ A possible course of action included:

...downsizing our Kabul ISAF contingent to a small [NSE] and staff, and one LAV or Iltis/Mercedes-based infantry company group with one troop of Coyotes and some ISTAR assets... pick up or share one PRT relatively close to Kabul, total about 120. Make sure that CIDA is willing to kick in funds to support local CIMIC projects to the tune of \$4 Million Cdn per year...deploy three medium-lift Cormorant helicopters based in Kabul. Primary mission to support the Cdn PRT, secondary mission to support the rest of ISAF.¹⁹

As Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT planning continued, another idea emerged in Kabul. How about Canada taking a PRT in Kabul, plus satellites in Parwan, Logar and Wardak provinces? This was logistically advantageous and salient. It was sent to Ottawa for consideration but there was still no response.²⁰

Throughout September and October 2003 there were high-level debates raging over the future of the various American and NATO command structures in Afghanistan, and how they could or should be related. By October 2003, an agreement was reached between the CENTCOM Commander-in-Chief, General John Abizaid, and SACEUR, General James Jones, agreed that ISAF expansion through the medium of the PRT was a good approach. It would contribute to security sector reform outside Kabul but more importantly, it was a “potential medium for the Afghan Transitional Administration to extend its influence outside of Kabul.”²¹

The situation in Afghanistan was changing throughout 2003. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM analysis passed to NATO concluded that the Taliban and Al Qaeda were in the process of “launching a concerted campaign” against ISAF, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM,

the Afghan Transitional Administration, and the non-governmental organizations in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Recruitment was up. There were more and more meetings between the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership. More insurgent support money was detected. Assassination plans against Presidents Karzai in Afghanistan and Musharraf in Pakistan were uncovered. The possibility of a split within the Taliban leadership, including the possible emergence of an even more radical faction was of some concern. Mullah Omar was seen by some analysts to be comparatively moderate.²²

Kandahar was of particular concern, given its centrality in southern Afghan economic and religious/political life. By the fall of 2003, there had been two simultaneous attacks on government checkpoints, attacks which exhibited evidence of coordination and improved organization. Pro-government mullahs were assassinated in Kandahar in August 2003, while local people complained that there were more and more illegal vehicle checkpoints and inadequate policing. In Zabul province, there was more enemy activity than before but local Afghan forces and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM special forces were keeping the enemy off balance. Most insurgent activity, however, appeared to be in Kandahar province. There were further indications that the HiG organization was increasingly involved and supported by three groups in Pakistan.²³

This was all in the lead up to a North Atlantic Council meeting where NATO agreed to expand ISAF throughout Afghanistan. The Germans pushed for command of the former Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT in Konduz as a pilot programme (in part to get out of Kabul), while limited deployments of ISAF forces were permitted outside the existing area of operations around Kabul. In effect, the North Atlantic Council agreed that the expansion of ISAF “would strengthen the ability of the Afghan Transitional Administration to provide a secure environment” for reconstruction.²⁴

In November 2003, the Minister of National Defence asked for options vis-à-vis Canada and ISAF. The CDS explained that, by February 2004, Canada needed a strategy to find nations able to replace the Canadian contingent in Kabul in August 2004. It was now NATO’s responsibility, not Canada’s, but “NATO has experienced considerable difficulty in finding nations willing to provide resources deemed necessary....” NATO, furthermore, could not force countries to commit, so if Canada had interests worth protecting in Kabul, “we must...assume an active role outside of the force generation process.” Canada could not sustain its effort in Kabul past August 2004 but Canada could not unilaterally withdraw.²⁵



Photo Credit: Author

Kandahar City is Afghanistan's Second City. It is the crossroads of trade nationally and regionally and is also a vital seat of religious legitimacy in the Pashtun areas of the country.



Photo Credit: Author

The Canadian Government Changes: December 2003

Political changes in Canada affected the course of events: Paul Martin replaced Jean Chretien as Prime Minister in December 2003. This led to an alteration of Canadian foreign and defence policy, a process that became the primary focus of activities in Ottawa. By May 2004, there was renewed interest in sorting out Canadian commitments in Afghanistan. The options as they stood were:²⁶

1. maintain the new Kabul commitment of Camp Julien, an ISTAR squadron, and support but reduce Canada's 'profile' in ISAF and Afghan circles;

2. establish a Canadian PRT in 2005;
3. do both commitments in 2005; and
4. get out of Afghanistan altogether by August 2005.

The planners cautioned against option 4 because it would seriously harm Canadian/American/British and Canadian/NATO relations.

Once again, the possibility of committing Canadian forces to Iraq was raised in September 2004. It was reiterated that the Canadian Forces could only offer limited support to any Iraq endeavour because of the Afghanistan commitments. Perhaps some “counter-terrorism” capability (read: special operations forces) or individual augmentees could be provided, but the CDS reminded the Minister of National Defence that Canada already contributed four exchange officers including a major-general, 20 police instructors in Jordan, two RCMP and one Foreign Affairs officer in Baghdad, plus the assistant military advisor to the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq. At \$300 million, Canada was also the seventh largest donor of aid in Iraq.²⁷ Iraq was off the table for the time being.

In October 2004, Canada stood up Operation ARCHER as a separate commitment to Afghanistan. MGen Leslie’s original recommendations regarding increased Canadian involvement with Afghan National Army training finally bore fruit but in a more formal fashion. The original training team was constituted from existing manpower from the Canadian contingent. Now it became a separate mission. One of the reasons for establishing ARCHER was that Canada could contribute to better collective training for the Afghan National Army “on tasks that will support ISAF exit strategies.” The connections made during training led to long-term relationships with Afghans; this was deemed “particularly important as Canada continues with PRT programmes and follow-on development programmes.” That is, Canada could make and leverage more and more personal contacts with a greater variety of Afghans.²⁸

Involvement with Afghan National Army training, however, meant dealing with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM as the NATO-led ISAF was not formally involved with Afghan National Army training yet.²⁹ That meant that Canadian staff had to establish links to the new American command, CFC-A, the main Operation ENDURING FREEDOM headquarters for Afghanistan. In addition to the planned 14-man ETT that would work with TF Phoenix, three officers would deploy to CFC-A HQ and another two to CJTF-76. This gave the Canadian Army an “in” with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, which in turn would increase Canadian visibility on their activities, specifically PRT development.

On the down side, Operation ARCHER ETTs were not authorized to “participate in directed operations unless approved,” a reflection of concern for political sensitivities regarding perceptions of ISAF ‘stabilization’ versus Operation ENDURING FREEDOM ‘combat.’³⁰

If Canada committed to a PRT under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, it would come under the rubric of Operation ARCHER, not Operation ATHENA. Between May and November 2004, National Defence, Foreign Affairs and CIDA worked to figure out what a Canadian PRT contribution would look like.

In August 2004, the PRT working group explored “post-August 2005 deployment to Afghanistan options.” At that time, there were two other geographical regions competing for Canadian Forces attention: the Middle East and Africa. There was a possibility that one of the historically numerous Palestinian-Israeli peace settlements might be signed with the possibility that it might require interpositional peacekeeping force. No one in the working group was holding their breath. As for Africa, developments there would “remain a peripheral concern” particularly the Sudan where no one so far had asked for a commitment of troops and in any event, there was no peace framework anyway.³¹

That left Afghanistan. The assessment was nothing short of dire; the Working Group concluded that “The threat of government collapse in 24 months is HIGH.” ISAF staged expansion (see Figure 8-1) was critical to avoid this but, as the group noted:

Stage I: experienced force generation difficulties;

Stage II: expansion shows signs of force generation troubles; and

Stages III and IV: force generation will likely begin in mid- to late-2005.

“Afghan political, social, and economic stability remains precarious.... Extending the influence of the Afghan government beyond Kabul is critical. ISAF support to Afghan elections is a function of its PRT footprint.”³²

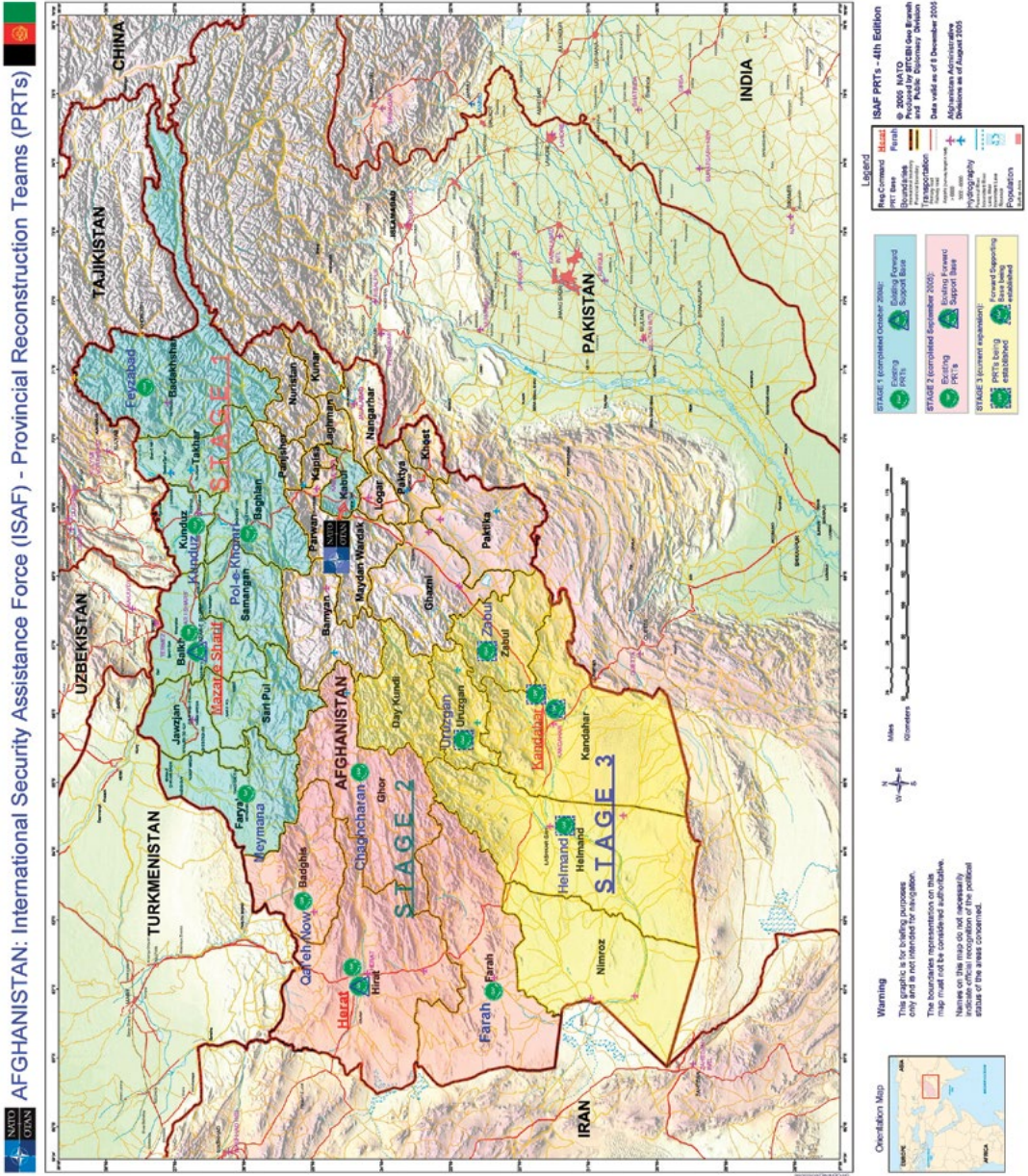


Figure 8-1: NATO International Security Assistance Force Stage III Expansion

Source: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The options suggested by the working group were:

- 1a. Canada backfills an existing PRT or establishes a new one;
- 1b. Canada leads the establishment of a PRT and a forward support base [brigade HQ and battalion-sized quick reaction force];
2. Canada keeps a recce squadron in Kabul;
3. Canada deploys a battalion group in KMNB under the United Kingdom's lead; and
4. Combination of 1 and 2, or 1 and 3.

All options would require “interdepartmental consensus on a concept of operations, role and structure. Foreign Affairs and CIDA have already committed to a PRT.” Indeed, Foreign Affairs preferences were Herat, Chaghcharan, Qal’eh-ye Now, Farah and Kandahar.³³

One month later, a deployment order was issued for the PRT Strategic Reconnaissance Team, which consisted of personnel from the Canadian Forces, CIDA, DFAIT, and the RCMP. The Strategic Reconnaissance Team’s task was to “determine the most suitable location for establishing a Canadian PRT.”³⁴

The Strategic Reconnaissance Team was provided with detailed direction. Canada already committed to a PRT during the NATO Istanbul Summit – now it was time to select a location. Herat and Kandahar had by this point been narrowed down as the main contenders. Herat was now on the table after CDS General Henault was buttonholed by SACEUR during a trip to Afghanistan. The Strategic Reconnaissance Team leader was specifically instructed to confirm with his interdepartmental confreres that there was a “3D understanding of the security environment.” In addition, to avoid the problems that existed between the Canadian Forces and CIDA in previous years, CIDA was to “in collaboration with DND, explore CIMIC opportunities which take into account the evolution of and within the PRTs” and that CIDA would look at links to “a Government of Afghanistan National Development Strategy, including the National Priority Programs.”³⁵

The three departments finally agreed to five criteria prior to the departure of the PRT Strategic Reconnaissance Team. Any Canadian commitment should:

1. support NATO ISAF Stage II expansion;
2. relieve United States forces;

3. optimize Canadian effects in Afghanistan;
4. build the 3D approach on the Canadian development process; and
5. have adequate combat support and sustainability to the endeavour.³⁶

By early November, the PRT Strategic Reconnaissance Team reported in. This team deployed for 10 days to Afghanistan in October 2004 to study PRTs and where things stood. One of the main problems the team encountered was the lack of a senior Canadian representative at ISAF HQ and “problems of getting the real data out of ISAF HQ. Supporting briefings were useless.” (This was a result of the lack of Canadian saliency in Kabul post-August 2004).

The Strategic Reconnaissance Team determined that Canada could maintain a surveillance squadron in Kabul and a PRT in either Herat or Kandahar. The Kandahar commitment could start as early as August 2005 while the province was under American lead. The British were looking at taking lead headquarters in Kandahar, so, the Strategic Reconnaissance Team noted, there was a possibility that a Canadian task force could deploy in January or February in 2006. As for Herat, Canada could take over the PRT, the forward support base and the brigade headquarters for the planned NATO ISAF Regional Command (West) HQ.³⁷

Canada’s ambassador to Afghanistan, Chris Alexander, wanted a Canadian presence in Kabul, but pointed out that the emergent National Priority Program that the government was working on would need to use PRTs in the provinces so that reconstruction aid could be delivered and those outlying areas connected to the government in Kabul. He had no preference, he told the Strategic Reconnaissance Team, but he leaned towards Kandahar.³⁸

Discussions with CFC-A indicated that CFC-A was “facing a major counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan.” The success of the 2004 elections was an operational defeat for the Taliban and they would react to it. The DComd of CFC-A, a British officer, thought Canada should commit to taking over Regional Command (West). Over at the Office of Military Cooperation Afghanistan, a staff officer noted presciently that focus on counter-narcotics, which would increase in the near future, “could expose the PRT as a soft target for retaliation from the organized crime factions.” In his view, a Herat PRT would not be as affected as the one in Kandahar.³⁹

When the Strategic Reconnaissance Team visited CJTF-76 (CJTF-180’s replacement – the 25th Infantry Division took over in 2004 from the 82nd Airborne), they were encouraged to recommend Herat. However, “it was evident that CJTF-76 has not conducted any planning for the ISAF expansion in Stage II and III.” This was a disturbing development on many levels, but the Strategic Reconnaissance Team did not elaborate with details.

The argument for Herat lay on the basis that it was a stable region post-Ismael Khan. An American task force, TF Longhorn, could provide the security a Canadian PRT would need as it went about its business. Notably, special operations forces could play a role: “Herat offers good opportunities for the involvement of CSTO [special operations forces]. Early introduction would help shape the battlefield while strategic reconnaissance and direct action in the more remote areas would support PRT patrols.”⁴⁰

The Kandahar PRT, as it stood in 2004, “is part of a counterinsurgency operation commanded by Regional Command (South).” The present PRT “under Task Force BRONCO, limited itself to civil affairs projects and force protection patrols in the vicinity of the PRT....it is considered a manoeuvre unit of TF BRONCO.” There were severe restrictions on how it was currently being used, as the Strategic Reconnaissance Team noted:

The PRT functions as a civil affairs-centric scheme that is felt to be inadequate to meet future ISAF tasks. A different structure and concept of operations would better enable the PRT’s ability to increase the influence of the Government of Afghanistan inside the province but this would be a challenge and difficult to implement under the TF BRONCO command.⁴¹

Furthermore, “a Canadian PRT would be expected to contribute to counterinsurgency operations.” As for special operations forces, there was “some possibility of employment but the large presence of coalition special operations forces conducting counterinsurgency is noted.”⁴²

During the month that followed, National Defence, Foreign Affairs and CIDA debated the merits of the PRT commitment. On 7 December 2004, the three ministers delivered their recommendation to the Prime Minister, Paul Martin. In light of the upcoming NATO foreign minister’s meeting and an informal NATO summit planned for early 2005, the three sought approval to establish a Canadian PRT in Afghanistan. The reason for doing so was:

Canadian policy has taken a leading role for three years now. We joined the United States and its allies in the neutralization of the terrorist threat and to create a solid foundation [for reconstruction] so Afghanistan can never be a safe haven for terrorists. Both of these goals are integral to the security of Canadians and our relationship with our international partners, in particular the United States.⁴³

Furthermore, “our diplomatic presence has facilitated significant progress on a number of issues.” Afghanistan was a fragile state and authority must be extended to the provinces: “Enhanced international assistance, particularly outside Kabul, will be the key to the success of Afghan-led efforts.” Canada had four objectives:⁴⁴

1. ensure Afghanistan becomes a stable, democratic, self-sustaining state with no haven for terrorists;
2. build Canada's profile and influence on peace and security issues and demonstrate that Canada can make a difference;
3. support NATO in its first critical non-European operation; and
4. support the United States in its global campaign against terrorism.

A Canadian PRT “would signal our intentions to our allies, effectively staking a claim to a location for a Canadian PRT that best suits our interests.” Its mandate would be to “establish a secure environment and extend government authority.”

The most important factor was NATO ISAF expansion Stage III. Canada's options were limited by the Italian/Spanish/Portuguese acceptance of Regional Command (West). Stage I and Stage II were already taken by other countries, while the United Kingdom was looking at taking over Stage III. Stage III would cover southern Afghanistan “where the insurgency is waning.” Stage IV, Regional Command (East) was engaged in “intense counterinsurgency operations.”⁴⁵

Consequently, Kandahar was the best option that fit Canadian objectives. “Our vision for a PRT, focused on stabilization, could produce results” in that taking the Kandahar PRT could “possibly assist in accelerating the eventual convergence of the ISAF and OEF missions.” That is, Canada could act as a bridge between the two and facilitate NATO Stage III expansion. There were risks, however. There was a lack of governance, insurgent attacks and ongoing criticism by some of the blurring between PRT development and counterinsurgency: “the profile, safety, and impact of our PRT could be diminished as a result of the counter-terrorism activities of large numbers of coalition forces in that region.” Canada's efforts would focus on building relationships, influencing the behaviour of the leadership in Kandahar province, and improving governance capacity.⁴⁶

There was, generally, a split in DFAIT on taking on an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT. One faction opposed it, and, aping a variant of the French line, did not want Canada to have anything to do with such a PRT because it might play a role in the American-led high-value enemy leadership hunting and counterinsurgency operations. As one observer noted, “some people wanted to just ‘do nice’ and not do ‘not nice’.” Finally, on 9 December 2004, Canada publicly announced that it would accept command of a PRT for Kandahar province. Canada was headed back south.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

Kandahar City is situated on a millennium-old trade route between the Indian sub-continent and ancient Persia. The Taliban were initially formed in 1996 to clear the Chaman-Kandahar highway on behalf of Pakistani economic interests.

Hillier Takes Command: February 2005

By February 2005, General Rick Hillier replaced General Ray Henault as the CDS. The change in command produced significant changes in how the Canadian Forces approached Afghanistan, specifically operations in the south and the PRT. One of these changes was the creation of Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command (CEFCOM). CEFCOM in effect replaced the DCDS functions under a single general who now handled an operational command that was physically removed from NDHQ and the downtown Ottawa bureaucracy and sent to the Star Top complex in the east end of Ottawa. The most important aspect of CEFCOM's establishment was that it buffered military operational planning and the conduct of operations from direct interference by the politically driven components of the military and civilian defence bureaucracy, which, as seen in the Kabul chapters, had significant negative effects on the conduct of operations.

On the international front, the NATO Heads of State meeting in February 2005 revealed that there were continued issues between the French position and the American position on the command structure and the specifics of the relationship between ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. What role this played in Canada's decision to commit is unclear, but it slowed the momentum for NATO's expansion in Afghanistan. Ultimately, however, the Heads of State agreed to continue with ISAF expansion into the Stage II area of western Afghanistan, with Italy in the lead.⁴⁷ NATO Heads of State also vaguely pledged to "enhance cooperation with OEF."

Focus now shifted to the specifics of the Canadian Kandahar commitment. Though it can make for tedious reading (and writing) this process is important historically because decisions made at this time had a dramatic impact during the course of operations the following year. If Canada had not gone with the force structure that came out of this process, it is likely that Kandahar and Helmand provinces would have collapsed in the face of insurgent action in the summer of 2006.

In early March 2005, military representatives of the four countries that were looking at commitments to Regional Command (South) – Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States – met in several sessions to hash out the specifics of Stage III expansion. The British position was that they wanted to take command of Regional Command (South) and Kandahar province. A United Kingdom-led NATO headquarters, the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps, was preparing to take over ISAF HQ in August 2006, right when Stage III expansion was supposed to occur.⁴⁸ However, there were domestic political factors that were edging the British military planners towards taking Helmand province with a battle group and a PRT, which forced them to relinquish their designs on Kandahar province. Some of those factors inclined the planners away from taking Regional Command (South) lead.

The Dutch suggested making Regional Command (South) HQ a rotating headquarters between Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. This approach had been previously implemented in Bosnia under SFOR and was considered successful; General Hillier commanded Multinational Division (South-West) in Bosnia in 2001 and was conversant with the idea.

As an aside, those domestic factors in the British case related to the matter of narcotics and the belief that Helmand province was the core of this activity in Afghanistan. The focus of British operations in Afghanistan was counter-narcotics before anything else. British commanders, including Lt Col Stuart Tootal who was bound for Afghanistan with 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment battle group, was vexed that:

part of the UK's mission was the stated intent of eradicating the cultivation of opium poppies. Ninety-three percent of the world's opium comes from Afghanistan, with half the crop being grown in Helmand. Most of it enters Western cities in the form of heroin and it feeds the habit of 95 percent of Britain's addicts.⁴⁹

Indeed, Tootal and others pointed out to their leaders that eradication would undermine local support for the Afghan government, in an area they were headed into:

I raised this issue with the Whitehall officials who briefed us on the mission.... Despite these concerns, the advocates of official policy insisted that reducing the production of opium was an essential part of the mission.⁵⁰

A Canadian analysis provided by LCol Robert Jensen of Operation ACCIUS, expressed concerns similar to Tootal in January 2005:

So far, the focus has been on the farmers, which is the poorest and most vulnerable link in the chain. The counter-narcotics program is strengthening the drug lords because the higher the person is in the chain the greater percentage of drugs they can store. The eradication program will take away the income of the farmers and dramatically increase the profits of the middle men and the drug lords. The effort must focus higher up the chain but this is difficult because many of the senior drug dealers have direct ties to the senior bureaucrats, military, and politicians.⁵¹

Additionally, it appeared to Canadians participating in discussions that the United Kingdom was leaning away from Regional Command (East) as much as possible – even geographically. The British political leadership arguably wanted to conduct counter-narcotics and development operations rather than fight the American ‘Global War on Terror.’

The reality of the situation was that all of this overlapped, but some form of cognitive dissonance was preventing clarity. As a result, the United Kingdom shifted more and more towards a Helmand focus in the planning process in the spring of 2005.⁵²

What did this mean for Canada? This was where the idea that Canada would take lead of Regional Command (South) with a Canadian-based multinational brigade took shape. The Canadian PRT commitment was a catalyst for Stage III expansion in that it was more like an ISAF PRT than an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM PRT but as the details were hammered out, and there was no detailed plan in existence, the flow of events took up both organizations and swept them together. Moreover, there was precedence for this – the NATO PRTs in the north and west were supported by a brigade headquarters and enablers and was styled as a ‘Forward Support Base,’ which Regional Command (South) headquarters resembled.

By March 2005, these ideas solidified into plans. Canada was taking a PRT in Kandahar; the British were going to go into Helmand with a PRT and a light infantry battalion. The Dutch were seriously looking at Oruzgan. Ultimately, all four nations accepted that “it was in the U.S. interest to ensure a successful transfer to NATO of the appropriate parts of the current operation as part of their plans for the transformation of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and the region and they would thus do all they could to make it happen.”⁵³ A regional brigade-level “surge/strike” capability was necessary to back up the PRT-battalion combinations that the British and the Dutch were looking at. The Regional Command HQ would “have to perform a command function rather than act as a coordinating function between the various provincial national groupings. The one deficiency was in aviation, however, and that needed to be addressed in due course.

The American position, and this is important to note given subsequent events in 2006, was that any arrangement could not interfere with American activities involving the tracking and neutralization of high-value terrorist leadership targets and that there would be “proactive” rules of engagement to allow the forces to take the fight to the enemy. This was not a UN operation; this was not a NATO Balkans operation. That was clear. Finally, the American representatives explained that they did not want to take up the role of regional firefighter to bail out national contingents from circumstances of their own making.”⁵⁴

At this time, the issue of what threat level the incoming forces could expect to face emerged. A non-Canadian view was that “The biggest single threat to security stability in the Stage III area comes from criminal elements engaged in drug production and trafficking throughout the region who intend on protecting their lucrative trade.”⁵⁵ The quadrilateral planning group had already expressed a slightly different view in that there would be “greater military challenges of the Stage III area.”⁵⁶ According to Canada’s new CDS, General Hillier:

What I did insist on was that a full battle group should be sent to Kandahar along with a [PRT], because two or three hundred Canadian soldiers in the [PRT] could make little impact on their own. If the security situation in Kandahar became dire, as indeed it did soon after our arrival, those soldiers would be stuck in vulnerable positions with no easy way to ensure their security or rescue them from the extreme risk they would face every day.⁵⁷

And this was in line with what the other four Regional Command (South) countries were already contemplating – a PRT with a twinned battalion group in each of the assigned provinces.

A Canadian Air Wing in Afghanistan?

Once again, as it had in Kabul, the shortage of aviation resources came up for discussion. Regional Command (South) was geographically huge. Consequently, rapid response to crisis situations demanded helicopters and close air support. At issue was that the Americans were contemplating relinquishing control of Kandahar Air Field and withdrawing their aviation assets to Bagram as part of Stage III or Stage IV. The British and Dutch were going to bring helicopters and close air support aircraft for their forces: what was Canada going to do? A staff check was made on the possibility of deploying six CF-18s, building on the 2001 planning. Another was conducted to determine helicopter availability.⁵⁸

The saga of the loss of Canadian medium-lift helicopter capability dates from the dark days of the 1990s when political decisions resulted in the selling of the Canadian CH-47 Chinook force to the Netherlands – exactly the same Dutch helicopters that were deployed to Kandahar in 2005. The replacement of Canada's Kiowa armed observation helicopters, its Twin Huey tactical transports and the CH-47s with a single air frame optimized for executive transport left Canada hamstrung in later years, particularly in Afghanistan. Even the Kiowa would have been useful, as functionally equivalent American aircraft like the OH-58D Warrior wound up supporting Canadian ground forces later in 2007-2009 because there was no Canadian capability.

Under Hillier's leadership, the Canadian Forces initiated a medium-lift helicopter acquisition programme in 2005. It would take time, however, to regain this lost capability so a staff check was conducted to see what could be done. The main requirements for aviation in southern Afghanistan in the context of 2005 included troop lift, casualty evacuation, sling load for resupply, command and control, reconnaissance and over-watch. Planners looked at the CH-124 Sea King and the CH-146 Griffon. For some reason the new CH-149 Cormorant helicopter, as suggested by MGen Leslie back in Kabul, was not to be considered. The use of the CH-124 was discouraged as well, according to the staff check, "employment of the Sea King in Afghanistan will further degrade the ability of the air force to fulfill defence tasks in support of the Chief of the Maritime Staff."⁵⁹ The message was clear:

the Air Force and Navy were not prepared to relinquish helicopters for Afghanistan, implying that the continental defence task for North America would be compromised.

That left the CH-146 Griffon. As these machines were later deployed to Afghanistan in 2009, the decision not to deploy them in 2006 becomes a serious historical question. One argument that made the rounds in the Canadian Forces was that if the CH-146 was deployed, then the government might not want to spend money on a medium-lift helicopter and claim that one was not needed. This cannot be substantiated in the available documentation, even though it may have been part of the unwritten zeitgeist. There was already substantial criticism directed at the limitations of the CH-146 aircraft long before Afghanistan, even though the aircraft served well in Bosnia with SFOR and in Kosovo with KFOR where crews made the machines do things they were not designed to do. Mud stuck to the Griffon, as it did with the TUAV, long after that system matured and proved its capabilities.

A combination of factors most likely militated against the CH-146 deployment. First, the Chief of the Air Staff of the day was unenthusiastic and, given the choice between deploying CH-146s and the possibility of deploying CF-18s to Kandahar for a close support task, the CF-18s won out (though these were ultimately not deployed either). Second, General Hillier was skeptical about Canadian CH-146 operations while he was Commander Multinational Division (South-West) in Bosnia in 2001 and this possibly influenced him to focus on medium-lift helicopter acquisition. Third, the costs associated with deploying either or both helicopter and close air support capability were probably intimidating to some in the bureaucracy.⁶⁰ Once again, attempts at being economical compromised a holistic Canadian force structure approach that, as we will see in 2006–2008, reduced Canadian capability and forced Canada to go begging for other's aviation at crucial times with a resultant loss of influence in coalition circles.

Task Force Afghanistan Emerges

From May to August 2005, however, both the Herat and Kandahar options remained on the table as the planners sorted out what the new commitment to the south would look like. Hillier's intent as of May 2005 was that Canada would run the PRT for at least 18 months, with the brigade headquarters commanding Regional Command (South) and the battle group task force arriving in February 2006. The task force would deploy for 12 months, and the headquarters for nine. That would act as a catalyst for Stage III expansion and the introduction of the rotational NATO command for Regional Command (South). In other words, the Canadian commitment in the south was initially seen to be around two years, not the seven it eventually became. Keep in mind that the high level of violence that inundated the south had not happened yet and there were no indications that the

insurgency would go the distance. The commitment and force structure were predicated on framework and reconstruction tasks in a low-level counterinsurgency environment, not the near-conventional war that emerged in mid-2006.⁶¹ This force would be called TF Afghanistan to differentiate it from TF Kabul.

Camp Julien would draw-down by October 2005 and transition the equipment and structures to the south. The Afghan National Training Centre presence and command staff and SAT-A would be retained in Kabul under command of TF Afghanistan. The task force for the south had to be robust – by this time the planners were well versed in the need to retain independent firepower capabilities. The basis of the task force structure was an artillery battery, a UAV troop, an electronic warfare detachment, a reconnaissance troop with Coyotes, engineering capabilities with counter-IED capacity, human intelligence and CIMIC teams, plus two LAV III-based infantry companies.⁶²

By the end of June 2005, the four nations involved in Regional Command (South) and Stage III expansion transition continued their deliberations. All were looking towards a February–March 2006 change of command and the idea of a rotating brigade headquarters for Regional Command (South) was locked down. Importantly, the four nations agreed to establish a Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit at KAF to replace the American “Charlie Med” facility there.⁶³ Manned like a similar multinational installation established by the Stabilization Force in Bosnia, Canada agreed to command this extremely important facility that would in time save countless lives, Afghan as well as Canadian. Having a Role 3 rather than a Role 2 facility meant that more sophisticated medical procedures could be undertaken within minutes of an incident, rather than hours or even days. The Americans agreed to provide medical evacuation helicopters in the form of U.S. Army UH-60 Blackhawks and U.S. Air Force HH-60 Pave Hawks to support it.

At this point, the Romanians also agreed to continue with the KAF security mission, a role they accepted from the Canadians back in 2002. What had not been sorted out was how the American ETTs working with Afghan National Army forces in Regional Command (South) would be commanded once the transition to ISAF took place. NATO was standing up Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, which were like ETTs without the logistics capacity, but they were not envisioned to be under TF Phoenix command (recall that TF Phoenix was an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM organization).⁶⁴

Reaching a Decision

The Kandahar decision was made in the summer of 2005. The decision to deploy special operations forces was “unilaterally made by the Prime Minister” but because of the “unpredictable domestic political climate”; it was not publicized.⁶⁵ The deployment of conventional forces was not, however, *un fait accompli*. A strong ‘Africa first’ lobby with

sympathizers ensconced in DFAIT, CIDA, and even DND, countered that Canada should devote its military resources to either Darfur or the conflict in southern Sudan in a UN ‘peacekeeping’ capacity rather than a ‘warfighting’ capacity in Afghanistan under what they perceived to be American command. The ‘Africa first’ faction had built up support in academia, in part of the media, and even from some celebrities. Elements of this faction leveraged the emotionalism surrounding LGen Romeo Dallaire’s role in the Rwandan genocide as an argument for Canadian intervention elsewhere in Africa. There were also continuing problems in Haiti and it looked as if there was going to be another Arab-Israeli peace agreement. As a result, the Martin government was forced to examine the cases for deploying troops to Darfur, southern Sudan, the Middle East, Haiti and Kandahar.

This sort of problem occurred in the past, particularly in the 1990s. The Canadian government, eager to satisfy everyone and offend no one, committed the Canadian Forces to multiple overseas missions without understanding sustainability. At one point, the Canadian Army was committed to Haiti, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Cambodia, Somalia, then Rwanda and Kuwait. The military leadership of the day did not stand up to this enthusiasm and the result was forced burnout and logistics overstretch.

In 2005, the military leadership was not going to repeat the same mistakes from the Decade of Darkness. The Prime Minister was told that “The Canadian Forces can only sustain one overseas theatre operations base and cannot activate two theatres at once. Intelligence support, medical support, and logistical support are all major factors. A deployment of a second task force is feasible but risky.” The planning staff worked through all of the possibilities and combinations, sorting pros and cons for each option. For example:

Darfur

Pros:

Nil.

Cons:

African Unity pride and independence;
 few traditional allies;
 many rebel groups;
 only rebels seeking support of international community;
 remote distant access;
 seasonal road network; and
 rudimentary development.

Or southern Sudan

Pros:

Multinational Stand-By High Readiness Brigade for UN operations.

Cons:

no mandate;
 no invitation;
 limited visibility internationally for Canada;
 multi-factional fighting;
 divergent interests; and
 huge geography.

As for Afghanistan, the mission was a UN-mandated NATO operation. It was part of the larger campaign against the Al Qaeda movement and affiliated groups that threatened Canadian interests and values. Canada was already deeply involved in the process of rebuilding a failed state. Finally, the PRT and other activities were going to allow Canada to implement a “focused 3D approach” to synergize defence, development and diplomacy in a multi-lateral context. The Sudan, Darfur, Haiti and the Middle East met none of these criteria or conditions. Afghanistan did.⁶⁶

Indeed, the staff made it clear that without continued involvement, as Canada had already committed to the future course of action by accepting a PRT, the fragile situation might collapse. The unstated result was that Canada would be contributing to something akin to Rwanda if the Taliban re-took the country and that other 9/11s would take place if Al Qaeda was able to base out of Afghanistan again.

The Martin government absorbed these arguments. In a series of communications between May and July 2005, the Prime Minister accepted the new mission in southern Afghanistan. The legal framework remained the same as it had since 2001 and the Prime Minister accepted the existing 2001–2003 strategic rationale for Canadian operations in Afghanistan as the basis for “air and ground combat operations directed against Al Qaeda, Taliban and anti-coalition armed groups within Afghanistan; other air and ground operations including the training of Afghan Security Forces, the creation of a Provincial Reconstruction Team; air interdiction operations against Al Qaeda, Taliban, HiG and other ACAG will be undertaken in international airspace; and other operations.”⁶⁷

On 15 September 2005, the CDS issued a deployment order:

Canada will deploy a battalion-sized Task Force in February 2006 to RIP with a U.S. unit in Regional Command (South) while manning a PRT. Additionally a brigade headquarters will be deployed to assume command of Regional Command (South) under an OEF mandate and to lead a multi-national brigade. This Canadian contingent will lead the RC (South) transition from OEF to NATO command and play a lead role in Stage 3 expansion and the merger of the OEF and ISAF missions.⁶⁸

While all of this planning was in progress, reports from Kandahar expressed concern about the assassination of Mullah Mawlawi Abdullah Fayaz, the top religious scholar who led the Kandahar Ulema Shura. His counterpart in Helmand, Haji Baba, was similarly killed, while another leading mullah, preparing to replace the murdered Mullah Lalojan, was publicly beheaded. There were also “increasing indicators of insecurity” in two provincial districts called Zharey and Panjwayi.⁶⁹

ENDNOTES

1. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (25 April 2002) (5 July 2002).
2. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (October 2002).
3. As discussed in Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom*. See also JTFSWA ASSESSREP (12 November 2002).
4. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (16 August 2002) (26 August 2002).
5. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (13 March 2002) (26 April 2002).
6. CJTFSWA ASSESSREP (27 September 2002) (13 November 2002).
7. HQ ISAF report 44 (23 September 2003).
8. Message Burgess to distribution list, “NAC Discussions on Afghanistan” (22 October 2003).
9. HQ ISAF report 117 (5 December 2003).
10. Comd TFK SITREP Number 3, Week of 18 to 24 August 2003 (24 August 2003).
11. Comd TFK SITREP Number 1, Week of 3 to 12 August 2003 (10 August 2003).
12. Comd TFK SITREP Number 2, Week of 11 to 17 August 2003 (17 August 2003).
13. Comd TFK SITREP Number 7, Week of 15 to 21 September 2003 (22 September 2003).
14. Comd TFK SITREP Number 4, Week of 25 to 31 August 2003 (31 August 2003).
15. *Ibid.*
16. Comd TFK SITREP Number 5, Week of 1 to 7 September 2003 (8 August 2003).
17. Memorandum COS J3 to dl, 4 A 0013 2 G 1, “Afghan Planning-Transition/Exit Strategy Development” (19 September 2003).

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18. Comd TFK SITREP Number 6, Week of 8 to 14 September 2003 (15 September 2003).
19. Ibid.
20. Comd TFK SITREP Number 8, Week of 22 to 28 September 2003 (30 September 2003).
21. SACEUR to CMC, "Possible Expansion of ISAF's Mandate in Afghanistan" (October 2003).
22. Message to NDCC, "NAC Meeting" (21 October 2003).
23. Message LFWA HQ to dl (22 August 2003).
24. COS SHAPE to dl, "ISAF Expansion-PRT Pilot Project" (7 October 2003).
25. Letter CDS and DM to MND, "Replacement Strategy: Canadian Forces Contribution to ISAF," Annex #1 Working Binder #1 (28 November 2003).
26. "Canada's Contribution to a PRT in Afghanistan" (4 May 2004).
27. Letter CDS to MND, "Possible Canadian Forces Contribution to Iraq" (7 September 2004).
28. COS J3 and J3 International to DCDS, "Op ARCHER-Staff Positions and ETT with CFC-A HQ" (21 October 2004).
29. There were, confusingly, several ISAF members that were involved in Afghan National Army training, but it was not controlled by ISAF. Rather TF Phoenix was the OEF entity that was the focal point of the effort and it reported to CJCMOTF.
30. 3350-165/A37 15 G 1, "Establishment of Op ARCHER" (22 October 2004).
31. "Mini-JSAT-PRT" (5 August 2004).
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Message to dl, "Deployment Order: PRT Strategic Reconnaissance Team" (7 September 2004).
35. "COS J3 Direction to Strategic Reconnaissance Team Leader-PRT" (18 October 2004).
36. 4 A 0013 Annex 1 5 G 2, "PRT SRT Report" (8 November 2004).
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Letter to the PM (7 December 2004).
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

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47. On 10 February 2005, NATO announced that ISAF would be further expanded, into the west of Afghanistan. The new area was RC (West) consisting of Badghis, Farah, Ghor, and Herat provinces. This process began on 31 May 2005, when ISAF took on command of two additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams, in the provinces of Herat and Farah and of a forward support base in Herat. At the beginning of September, two further ISAF-led PRTs in the west became operational, one in Chaghcharan, capital of Ghor province, and one in Qual'eh-ye Now, capital of Badghis province, completing ISAF's expansion into the west.
48. Briefing Note for the DCDS, "Report of Meetings in CENTCOM 7 March 2005: CF participation in Operations in Afghanistan" (11 March 2005).
49. Stuart Tootal, *Danger Close*, p. 27.
50. Ibid.
51. MLO report LCol R T Jensen (30 January 2005).
52. Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp. 602-603. His memoir neatly skirts the issue of the decision to commit British forces to Helmand, eradication policy, and the subsequent high level of violence.
53. "UK/NL/CA/ Afghanistan Quadripartite Conference: Military Talks" (13 April 2005).
54. Ibid.
55. "Stage 4 CONOPS OPG 3 May SITREP" (3 May 2005).
56. Quadrilateral Planning Conference with UK MOD (11-13 April 2005).
57. Hillier, *A Soldier First*, pp. 343-344.
58. "CF-18 Deployments-NRF versus OEF/ISAF" (8 June 2005).
59. "COS J3 Planning Guidance to J Staff for a Canadian Aviation Detachment in Afghanistan" (27 June 2005).
60. Leslie interview (26 October 2014). Some information is derived from a confidential interview conducted by the author on 11 January 2011 with a senior air force officer involved in helicopter operations during the period.
61. Presentation slides "Canadian Contribution to Afghanistan-Post-August 2005" (16 May 2005).
62. Ibid.
63. "Minutes of the ISAF Stage 3 Planning Conference 22 June 2005" (29 June 2005).
64. Ibid.
65. WikiLeaks, message American Embassy Ottawa to State, "Canada Agrees to Provide Special Operations Forces to OEF" (8 June 2005).
66. Draft Briefing with CDS input "CF Operations for Afghanistan Post-August 2005" (21 July 2005).
67. CDS Directive, "Campaign Planning in Support of CF Transition from Kabul to Kandahar, Afghanistan" (August 2005).
68. Message to dl, "Deployment Order: Afghanistan Transition Planning Conference 27 September-1 October, Qatar" (15 September 2005).
69. Message, Canadian Joint Delegation to the North Atlantic Council to NDHQ (9 August 2005).

OPERATION ARCHER:

THE PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM IN KANDAHAR, JULY 2005-JANUARY 2006

Transition: Task Force Kabul and Task Force Afghanistan

Dealing with the complexities of closing down Canadian Army operations in Kabul and standing up operations in Kandahar required significant coordination and leadership. In effect, TF Kabul and the new TF Afghanistan operated side-by-side temporarily as the mission transitioned. TF Kabul had to maintain Recce Squadron and the ASIC in support of the upcoming fall provincial elections in Kabul and stand up support for the Strategic Advisory Team, while simultaneously drawing down Camp Julien and the Canadian support structures. At the same time, the PRT was moving into a repurposed cannery eventually called Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar – and a new task force was required to support them. TF Kabul, during this time, continued with the long-established surveillance tasks in and around Kabul. Essentially, these supported the run-up to KMNB’s provincial voter registration operations. In early August 2005, TF Kabul Roto 3 under Col Semianiw handed off control to Col Steve Noonan’s TF Kabul Roto 4, which then became TF Afghanistan on 17 September 2005.¹

Col Noonan and his chief of staff, LCol David Anderson, were the prime movers in this process. *Ad hocery* was not going to work, so long before the new TF Afghanistan headquarters even deployed, they established their campaign plan before they left. Using the Cartier Drill Hall in Ottawa as a planning area, the new TF Afghanistan staff war-gamed the whole process.²

It was a serious challenge during this time as the Signals world had to maintain communications in Kandahar, Kabul, and for the large convoys that would be moving along Highway 1 between the two cities. The same went for the Electrical and Mechanical Engineers’ ‘wrench benders’ – convoys could not afford to break down as they passed through the disputed provinces of Wardak, Ghazni and Zabul. Keep in mind, of course, that these were not mere administrative moves and there was a growing insurgency in the country. Every aspect of the transition was, in theory, subject to enemy attack. Both organizations were beefed up to deal with the transition.³

A LAV III company from 2 RCR and the NSE handled security for the move. A series of recces, dubbed Operation CARTIER, were conducted along the 450 kilometre route; 450 kilometres was a long, long way in Afghanistan, so the magnitude of what

TF Afghanistan was going to do should not be underestimated. Either the convoys had to go from protected way station to protected way station, or they had to be completely self-sufficient from a defensive point of view and be able to leaguer next to the road at night. These options were called “Tunnel of Steel” and “Running Gun.” In the end a combination was employed, with a way station in Gardez.

The idea was that TF Afghanistan would cease Kabul operations between mid-September and early October, once the provincial elections were completed. However, on 8 October 2005, there was a massive earthquake in Pakistan. The Canadian government decided to deploy the Disaster Assistance Response Team to the stricken region. TF Afghanistan, in the middle of its complex preparations, was under some pressure to assist with Operation PLATEAU but because of tight timelines, it was only able to deploy CIMIC personnel for assessment purposes and some medical personnel from its Role 2 hospital to augment the effort.⁴

On 22 October 2005, Operation ATLAS commenced and the first convoys headed for Kandahar. There was one IED attack against a convoy on Highway 1, which produced no casualties but unfortunately, Pte Scott Woodfield from 2 RCR was killed when his LAV III rolled over on Highway 1 on 25 November. Operation ATLAS continued into early December. The enemy also reminded Canadians during the transition that TF Kabul operations were not exactly benign either. On 15 September, there was an IED strike against a Royal Canadian Dragoons Coyote, wounding two soldiers.⁵ The safe arrival of all of the Operation ATLAS convoys in Kandahar, save one in the course of nearly two months, was a monumental success not only from a logistics standpoint but also from a strategic one. Operation ATLAS demonstrated that large convoys could be conducted down Highway 1 in a hostile environment at that time. The enemy’s inability to interfere, disrupt or destroy the Canadian task force while it was on the move meant that operations down south in Kandahar in 2006 could proceed on time – and on target.

TF Afghanistan established itself in an empty compound at KAF across from the plywood shacks that housed the 173rd Airborne Brigade; that compound remained the location of all future TF Afghanistan incarnations until 2011. A construction troop from 191 Airfield Engineering Flight flew in from Canadian Forces Base Comox and, working with the task force engineers, started to build the bed-down facilities that would house future Canadian Army contingents coming into KAF.⁶

All was not well, however. The insurgency in southern Afghanistan was gaining momentum. Ironically, the altruistic Western relief efforts in the wake of the Pakistan earthquake inadvertently poured money into the coffers of jihadist organizations in that stricken country. The skeletal Taliban structures that scurried across the Durand Line in 2002 to avoid the wrath of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM were recovering. With more money, they became tanned and fit – and ready for a re-match.⁷

The War in the South, 2005

The decision to send a Canadian PRT to Kandahar province in spring 2005 now had to be implemented on the ground. Like SAT-A, the Canadian Army had never deployed anything quite like a PRT and still had to figure out how it would be structured and what it would do. To complicate matters further, the Canadian PRT had to operate as part of an American brigade combat team that was engaged not only in an unorthodox conflict but was operating in a complex command and control environment.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade formed the basis of Combined Task Force (CTF) Bayonet. This task force consisted of an infantry battalion, an airborne artillery battalion re-roled as infantry and a reconnaissance company, plus logistical support structures. Its operating area included Nimruz, Helmand, Zabul and part of Kandahar provinces (for comparative purposes, this understrength brigade was responsible for an area that would eventually boast three brigades of ISAF troops by 2007 and nearly two divisions by 2010).

CTF Bayonet was supposed to take over three PRTs: Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul. When Canada committed to Kandahar, the brigade became responsible for two. Special operations forces from TF 71 and then TF 31 handled Oruzgan province with the Australian SAS, while the Dutch and French special forces operated in Registan, Shorabak, Spin Boldak and Maruf districts of Kandahar province on the border with Pakistan. The special operations forces all reported to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), not CTF Bayonet, but could wind up operating in the Bayonet area of operations at any time.⁸

TF Gun Devils, the 3-319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment led by Lt Col Bert Ges, was responsible for the rest of Kandahar province. It consisted of an infantry company, an artillery platoon, an anti-tank platoon, a Romanian mechanized platoon and a military police platoon. There was an Afghan National Army kandak of three companies, but one company worked with the special operations forces, and one was used as static guards in a forward operation base in Shah Wali Kot district.

In terms of the Kandahar PRT, its rotation schedule was out of phase with CTF Bayonet and TF Gun Devils. It was scheduled to leave in June 2005, while the Canadian PRT was not scheduled to arrive until August. Bayonet and Gun Devils had to find some means to cover the gap but for nearly two months, PRT operations ceased. Compared to the incoming organization, the existing American PRT was small in numbers and oriented more toward force protection in a CIMIC-like role as opposed to a capacity-building or development role. There was a Civil Affairs organization at the brigade level, and there were Commanders Emergency Response Programme monies, but these were dedicated to Civil Affairs tasks, not long-term development. There was no connection between the PRT and the NSP or any of the other national programmes starting up in Kabul.⁹

As for security force capacity building, the Afghan National Army had its 205 Corps HQ stationed in Kandahar, but there was only one understrength infantry kandak, a combat support kandak and an embryonic combat service support kandak. There were some ETTs, but the Afghan National Army in Kandahar was far from combat ready in 2005. As for the police, there was a 20-man Military Police Mobile Training Team working with DynCorp contractors who ran the new Regional Training Center, plus two small Police Mentoring Teams working with the Border Police. For the most part, the existing police were un- or partially trained former AMF fighters.¹⁰

TF Gun Devils set out to learn what was going on in their area of operations. The pattern of enemy activity between February 2004 and January 2005 was undeveloped. There were IEDs but only in small numbers. The Gun Devils learned that, as early as February 2004, a 'spider device' IED was discovered in Sperwan in Panjwayi district and there had been an attack on a voter registration site in Talukan, also in Panjwayi district. The largest reconstruction project underway in the province was the Japan International Cooperation Agency-funded Ring Road paving project, which was paving Highway 1 from Kandahar City to Helmand province to the west and Highway 4 from KAF to Kandahar City. From October 2004 to April 2005, there were seven IEDs detonated on Highway 1, three in Panjwayi district in the Mushan-Bazaar-e Panjwayi road and three attacks on Highway 4. These IEDs employed various types of detonators hooked up to artillery and mortar shells. Casualties were minimal as none of the devices were large enough to destroy coalition patrol vehicles.¹¹

The bulk of enemy activity in early 2005 appeared to be in the mountainous and rugged Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts in the northern part of the province. As road paving between Kandahar City and Tarinkot in Oruzgan got underway in spring, the paving crews and their security engaged Taliban forces in those districts. As operations continued, ISTAR analysis determined that the overall leader for enemy operations in Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts was Mullah (Hayatullah) Khan, who commanded eight cells of 15 or so fighters, plus two IED cells.¹²

The rest of Taliban activity in Kandahar focused on the city. Mullah Osmani, a prominent Taliban leader during the regime, led the Kandahar group. His lieutenants were Hafiz Majid and Mullah Baqi. In 2004, they initially controlled three direct action cells (15 or so personnel per cell), an IED cell and a logistics cell. This organization essentially doubled in size by early 2005.¹³ (See Figure 9-1)

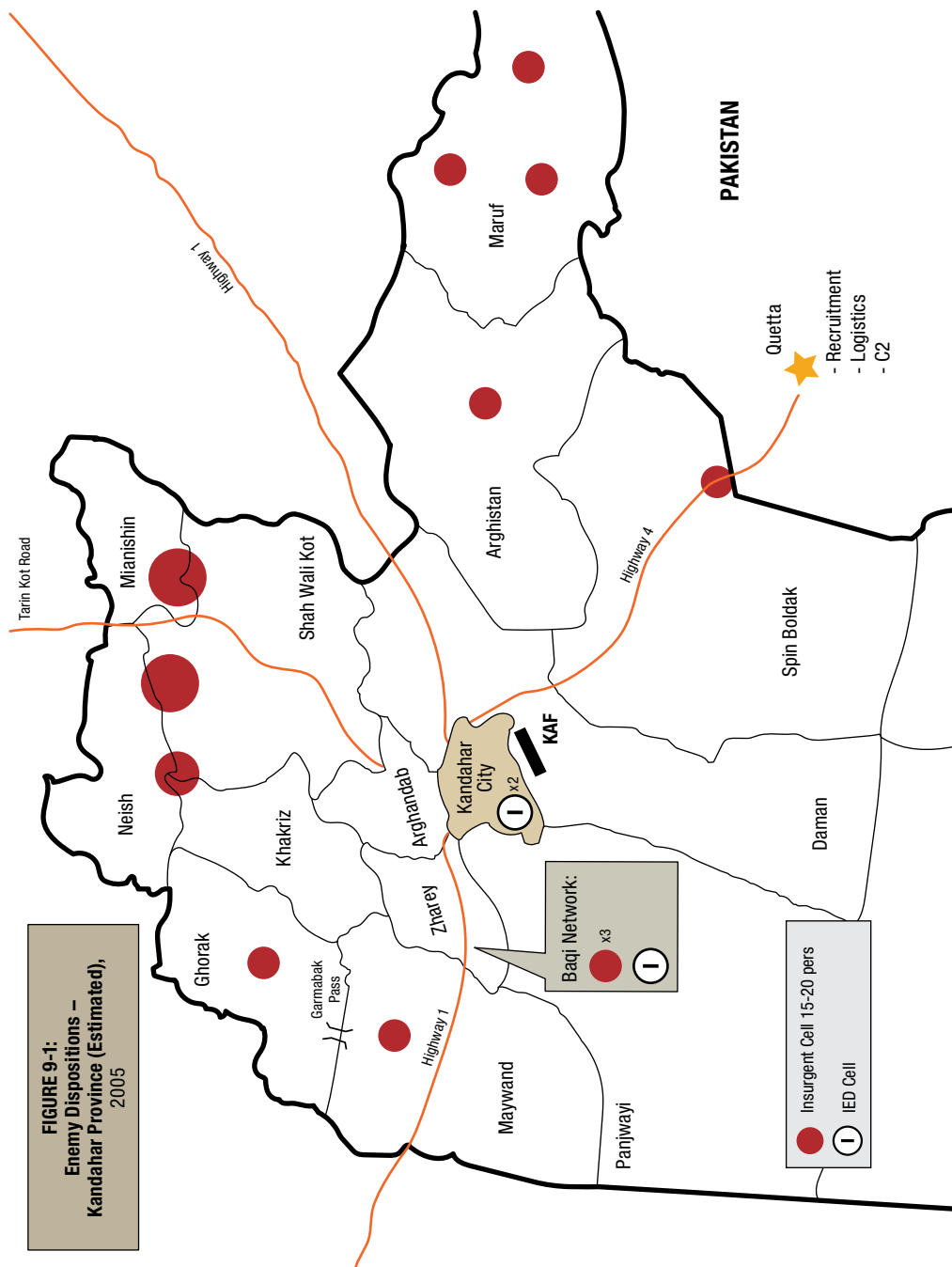


Figure 9-1: Enemy Dispositions – Kandahar Province (Estimated), 2005

In 2005, CTF Bayonet's and TF Gun Devils' primary task was to protect the National Assembly and Provincial Council Elections (NAPCE) process. NAPCE involved voter registration, the creation of a candidate list, campaigning, ballot distribution, then ballot collection and counting. Analogous to the national elections of 2004, the provincial elections of 2005 were key to extending the reach of the government into the rural area, and gaining legitimacy for both the government and the international community reconstruction efforts supporting it. ISTAR analysis anticipated that the enemy would pull out all the stops to interfere with NAPCE elements and phases to thwart Afghan government aims. The provincial elections were an important centre of gravity for the coalition forces and as such, it was a priority to disrupt the insurgents – wherever they might be.¹⁴

TF Gun Devils looked at the NAPCE timeline and crafted a campaign plan to support it. The elections were in September 2005. There would be three phases to the Gun Devils plan: the first had a manoeuvre focus. Until August, TF Gun Devils would conduct a series of operations in Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts to disrupt the enemy there. Another smaller operation would sweep through Zharey and Panjwayi districts. Then, in August, once the Canadian PRT was on the ground, a shift would occur into a phase that had a security and information operations focus. The infantry companies would then spread out into the communities with the Afghan security forces, distribute aid in conjunction with the CTF Bayonet Civil Affairs unit and the PRT, and conduct leadership engagements. Then, the forces would pull back; the Afghans would handle election site and polling station security while the task force would act as a QRF if there was trouble.¹⁵

The main TF Gun Devils operations in Shah Wali Kot, DIABLO REACH and DIABLO REACHBACK, turned into unanticipated and serious gunfights. Ambush activity then increased significantly on Highway 1 throughout the summer of 2005. This forced TF Gun Devils to re-assess what it was up against. The pattern of enemy activity, it turned out, was much deeper and broader than TF Bronco had either assessed or dealt with back in 2004. In June and July, there were near constant reports that Arab, Chechen and Punjabi fighters and bomb makers were entering the province to make up for local losses incurred by the Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin Taliban cells during TF Gun Devils' operations. Three prominent and vocal anti-Taliban Afghan religious leaders were also assassinated, as were an administrator in Shah Wali Kot and a judge in Panjwayi district. A convoy from the JEMB was also attacked in Maywand district. Six Taliban mullahs moved from rural area to rural area, spreading Taliban propaganda.¹⁶

As it turned out, there had been a meeting of the Taliban leadership body, the Quetta Shura, sometime in early June. Mullah Baqi, leader of the cells in Zharey and Panjwayi districts and former deputy minister for information and culture in the Taliban regime, met with Mullah Dadullah, Mullah Osmani and Mullah Mansour to look at ways and means

to generate feuds between the tribes, attack the security forces and undermine the 2005 elections. TF Gun Devils was essentially caught up in the early stages of this campaign.¹⁷

The new higher levels and types of enemy activity now seen in Afghanistan were not limited to Kandahar province; the Taliban and its supporters were a noticeably greater problem throughout the south in late 2004 and throughout 2005. CJSOTF's TF 71 led by Lt Col Paul Burton, and its replacement, TF 31, led by Lt Col Don Bolduc, were responsible for Tier II special operations conducted in southern and eastern Afghanistan. During the course of their operations in Oruzgan province in spring 2005, both commanders noted a distinct shift in how the enemy operated and those patterns were later identified in Zabol as well. U.S. Special Forces started taking more and more casualties from direct fire attacks, not just from IEDs. On numerous sensitive site exploitation missions, special operations forces discovered evidence of Chechen trainers and other foreign fighters from Arab countries working alongside the Taliban cells. One operation even photographed dead foreign leaders and fighters.¹⁸

When TF 71 and TF 31 commanders compared notes with the development agenda coming out of Kabul and looked at the attempts by the enemy to interfere with governance in Kandahar province, they concluded that the environment in the south was not permissive enough yet for development and sought to convince CJTF-76 and CFC-A that the tactical situation was changing. They were told that NATO would refuse to accept their assessments as it did not play well with political messaging to get NATO to take over the mission, and that NATO wanted to do stabilization and not do counterinsurgency – despite what might or might not be happening. There was a growing level of denial in Kabul about how dangerous the south was becoming. Maj Gen Kamiya and Lt Gen Eikenberry explained to Lt Col Bolduc that they could not acknowledge the situation officially because of the political realities surrounding ISAF expansion, but that TF 31 was to continue with its operations and develop a better picture of the situation throughout 2005.¹⁹

Operation ARCHER: The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar

Col Steve Bowes led the first Canadian PRT in Kandahar. Working with the Joint Operations Group in Kingston and studying the existing PRTs in Afghanistan, particularly the British PRT at Mazar-e Sharif, Col Bowes concluded that the best approach was for the Kandahar PRT to move away from CIMIC-like projects and focus on enabling security sector reform operations and larger reconstruction efforts. That, in the planner's view, would be a greater contributor to establishing security in the province. Tactical CIMIC would only take things so far: Afghan capacity to govern at the provincial and local levels had to be developed before any area of operations could be stabilized and secured. This meant that the PRT had to build relationships so it could build capacity and facilitate development.²⁰

The PRT had to understand the environment that it – and its successors – had to operate in. None of those data existed. What, exactly, was the state of development in the province? How would those activities, if there were any, relate to the national programmes starting up in Kabul? The PRT had to be structured to acquire that information.



Photo Credit: Author

In 2005, a former cannery in northeast Kandahar City was transformed into Camp Nathan Smith, home of the Canadian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team, here seen from the air facing southwest. Downtown Kandahar City is in the distance.

The Canadian government representatives involved in the decision to deploy the PRT wanted to adopt what was called at the time the ‘All of Government’ approach in Afghanistan. In the 1990s, an American general, Charles Krulak, coined the term ‘three block war’ as a means of describing concurrent fighting and development activities in the failed states of that era. This became a conceptual fad in United States defence circles which was then adapted by General Rick Hillier to become the ‘3D’ approach – defence, diplomacy and development – in which all three government entities were supposed to work in unison toward Canadian national objectives in a given target country.

There had never been a practical application of this idea in the Canadian context before and the operationalization of it had never really been thought through. This challenge was presented to Col Bowes and the Joint Operations Group planners to sort out. Consequently, the PRT was going to include a CIDA team for development, a Foreign Affairs team for governance and an RCMP team for policing. There were other government aid agencies working in the area, specifically USAID and the British Department for International Development (DFID). Both agreed to have their provincial representatives join the PRT. Collectively, these were the ‘OGDs’ or Other Government Departments.

At the same time, however, there was a war on and the PRT was forced to contribute to the more ‘kinetic’ aspects of that, despite what everyone wanted to do. TF Bronco’s PRT had been used (some might say misused) as a manoeuvre company to handle the Kandahar City area of operations and not as a capacity-building tool. There were indications that CTF Bayonet intended that the Canadian PRT take on the role of first responder in the vast maze-like city.²¹

The Canadian PRT in Kandahar, established at Camp Nathan Smith in the northeast district of the city, resembled no other Canadian Army organization in history. The 235-person PRT had four major sections: the OGDs, a Patrol Company, Military Function Enablers and Support. Based on B Company, 3 PPCLI, the Patrol Company consisted of two patrol platoons equipped with G Wagon armoured patrol vehicles. The functional enablers included a counter-IED/EOD disposal team with its Bison armoured personnel carriers and robots, a CIMIC team, a psychological operations team and a small intelligence cell. There was also a group of ‘PRT Police,’ which were militia forces formerly controlled by Abdul Raziq but hired by the PRT. Col Tor Jan’s militia platoon essentially handled local security, accompanied the patrols as escorts and facilitators, and conducted HUMINT for local force protection purposes. Broadly speaking, the Patrol Company, combat engineers and EOD disposal team, and Col Tor Jan’s men acted as a protective ‘delivery system’ for OGDs and their activities.²²

Notably, the deficiencies regarding CIDA-CF operations in Kabul were taken to heart. The new commanders in Ottawa allocated \$1 million to the PRT, styling it a “Commanders Contingency Fund” so “unforeseen gaps” that presented themselves during the transition from a United States-funded PRT to a Canadian-funded one could be dealt with. The Commanders Contingency Fund was also established “to allow the Commander to influence his area of operations in a timely manner by having the financial means to address mission-specific needs.”²³

Operating in Kandahar Province and the City

The Kandahar PRT personnel got to know Kandahar City and Kandahar province districts intimately. Most of the B Company soldiers had served during the 2002 rotation but their knowledge of the province was limited to the area around KAF. Now, three years later, they ranged far and wide during assessment patrols and OGD escort tasks. Kandahar City was inhabited by at least 500 000 people, with probably another 500 000 in the immediate environs. There were no street signs, few attempts at urban planning, and no traffic control systems, so the patrols nicknamed key routes and locations. There was Electronic Square, where appliances were for sale. There was the Crop Circle, a traffic circle with wheat growing on it. The rusting remains of a huge crane dominated Crane Route. Martyr’s Circle was the equivalent of a cenotaph. The most dangerous route was Highway 4

from the Golden Arches, the eastern gateway, to KAF. Highway 4 joined Highway 1 on Angle Road heading west: these areas canalized movement and were susceptible to IED attacks (this was also the site of a massive Mujahideen ambush in 1982, which destroyed 30 Soviet vehicles and resulted in the Soviets bulldozing the buildings along the road).²⁴ The northern ‘cone’ of the city was the Loy Wala area, a virtual ‘no-go’ area believed to be infested with Taliban sympathizers.²⁵ (See Figure 9-2)

Key locations that the Patrol Company delivered its CIMIC, DFAIT, CIDA, USAID, DFID and RCMP charges to in the city included the Governor’s Palace, the Guesthouse, the Provincial Development Committee, the police station complex and 205 Corps HQ. For example, if the CIDA representative needed to meet with the Provincial Development Committee, a patrol of three or four G Wagons with armed crews planned the operation. Routes to and from the PRT to the meeting site had to be varied and randomized to disrupt enemy targeting. The most dangerous leg was the return leg, since everybody had to eventually come home to Camp Nathan Smith and the routes nearby were few, which increased predictability. There were blind alleys, road debris, donkey carts and throngs of people, many of them wearing burkas. In this environment, troop discipline was at a premium so the wrong people did not get shot. Low-level leadership had to be top notch. Killing the wrong people could generate a riot or mass demonstration, which in turn would have spillover effects on other operations if other forces had to become involved.²⁶



Photo Credit: Author

Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team patrols in 2005 were faced with dilapidated municipal infrastructure and a virtual lack of municipal governance. This patrol has parked its G Wagons next to a human waste dump in the city’s core while conducting a school site assessment.

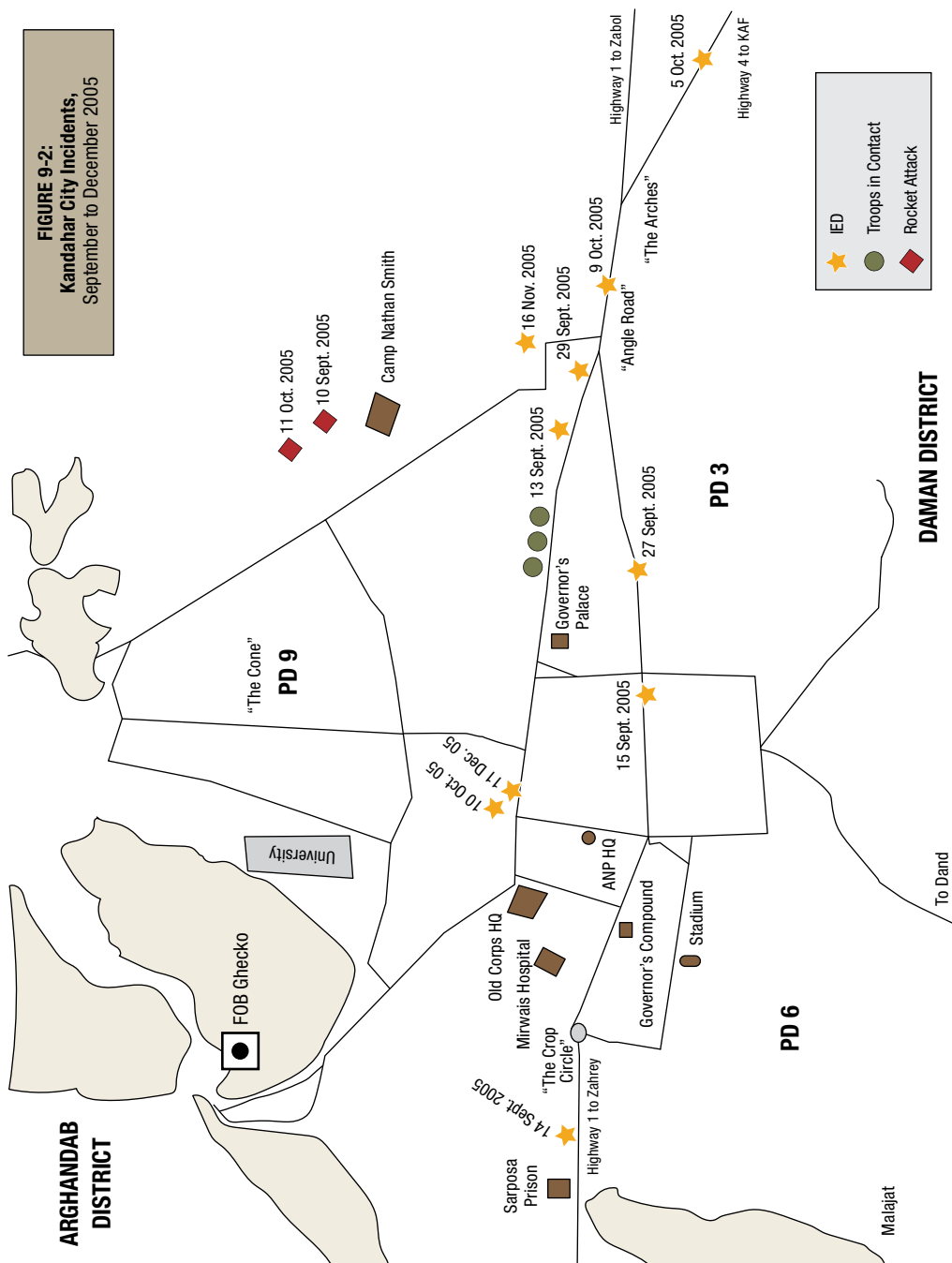


Figure 9-2: Kandahar City Incidents, September to December 2005

As the PRT pushed out into the rural districts more and more in the fall of 2005, the diversity of the terrain and the stark beauty of Kandahar province were more apparent. (See Figure 9-3)

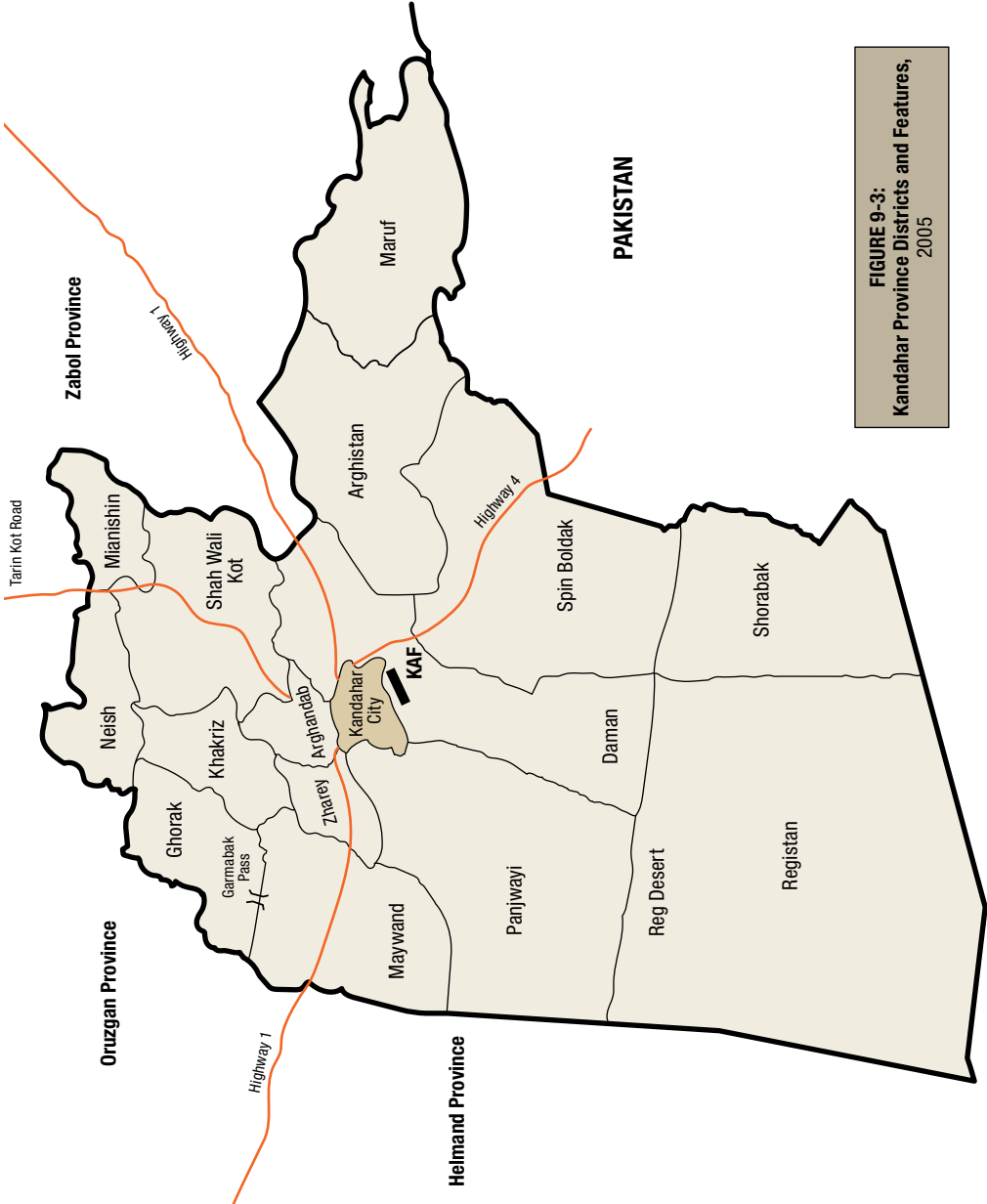


FIGURE 9-3:
Kandahar Province Districts and Features,
2005

Figure 9-3: Kandahar Province Districts and Features, 2005

Each district – and the PRT visited nearly all of them in those early months – had its own special characteristics. Registan and Shorabak contained the Registan Desert (interchangeably called the Reg Desert or the Red Desert by coalition forces), with undulating sand dunes, rock outcroppings and Kutchie nomads on camels. Maruf was a rugged, mountainous district with broad valleys abutting the Pakistan border, with Spin Boldak sandwiched between Registan, Shorabak and Maruf. “Spin B” was the regional trade entry point for Highway 4 past KAF to Kandahar City – it had been a regional entry point for over 1 000 years.²⁷

The Arghandab River cut across the province. Several districts cradled the river and its vital water supply from all sides: Maywand in the west; Zharey and Panjwayi with their grape fields to the north and south; into Arghandab with its orchards; up into the rocky Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts; and on to Oruzgan province. Ghorak, Khakrez and Nesh districts were remote, rural districts to the northwest, shielded by mountainous barriers and few roads. South of the city, prosperous and populated Dand connected Panjwayi with the area surrounding KAF, while to the east of KAF, rugged Arghistan linked the city with Maruf. Highway 1 ran through the province from Zabul to Helmand.²⁸

The PRT personnel rapidly appreciated that there was human terrain superimposed on the geographical terrain. A soldier from the 2002 rotation knew that there were Pashtun ‘tribals’ working for the coalition against the Taliban; it was a binary situation. If that same soldier came back to the province in 2005, he or she learned that there were nearly 26 different Pashtun tribal groupings and sub-groupings in the province, roughly divided into two confederations, the Durrani and Ghilzai. Allegiances shifted along with economic interests and power agendas so it was no easy matter trying to figure out who was who and what they wanted, especially with the influx of aid monies pending and deliberate attempts by the Taliban to aggravate inter-tribal disputes and tensions. The PRT gained insight into those dynamics during the course of the first rotation and this served future Canadian rotations well for the next five years.²⁹

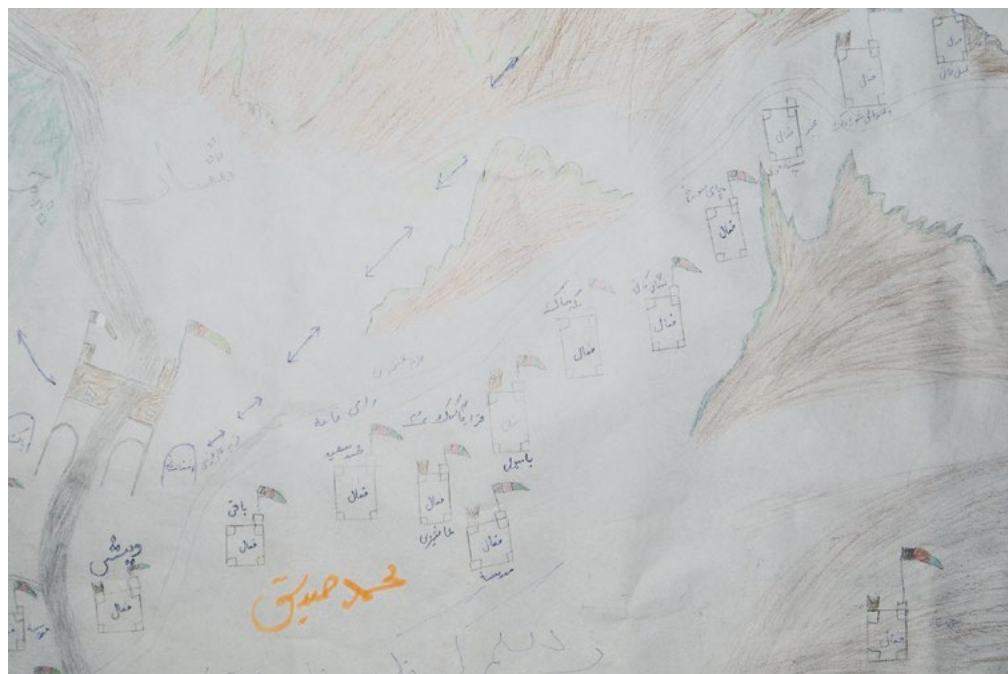


Photo Credit: Author

Provincial Reconstruction Team patrols to Spin Boldak on the border with Pakistan revealed that, despite their use of crayons instead of pixels, the Afghan powers had a more detailed understanding of the border situation than the coalition forces.

The Improvised Explosive Device War Starts in the South

The Canadian PRT, like Canadian units in Kabul, included an EOD capability for force protection purposes. The use of IEDs was not new in Kandahar province; anti-government forces employed the first ones in spring 2003. Those devices were comparatively unsophisticated but Operation ENDURING FREEDOM took the necessary steps to establish a Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell (CEX-C, pronounced 'sexy') in 2003–2004 as there was concern about the migration of IED tactics from Iraq to Afghanistan. CEX-C tracked weapon 'signatures' and procedures, collected information on bomb makers and support cells, and educated incoming units on the threat; Canadian EOD teams eventually developed a relationship with this cell at KAF.

The evolution of IEDs in the south was dramatic in 2005. The most primitive IEDs consisted of artillery or mortar shells rigged to some form of detonator that the victim activated: this was essentially an improvised mine. This type of device evolved into the pressure-plate IED, where the weight of a passing vehicle or person pressed two halves of a saw blade together to complete an electric circuit and then detonate the explosive. Another variant was the crush-plate IED.

Radio-controlled devices started to appear later on in the tour; these devices permitted the controlled targeting of a specific vehicle or person using a cell phone to detonate the IED. These ‘radio controlled’ IEDs also evolved. As insurgents learned that coalition vehicles were increasingly equipped with electronic countermeasures equipment in 2004, bomb makers developed the ‘spider device.’ An antenna was set up outside the range of the jammer, and then linked by a wire to the bomb. A ‘button man’ could observe the movement of the vehicle from a distance and carry out his attack.

All of these types of devices were in play in 2005 when the PRT arrived. The number of attacks in Kandahar province, however, was comparatively low. Between October 2004 and April 2005, seven IEDs detonated on Highway 1, three in Panjwayi district and three on Highway 4. Two detonated in May–July, another four in August. All of these attacks were against security forces.³⁰



Photo Credit: DND AR2005-A01-145a

By fall 2005, Kandahar City was immersed in an urban terrorist campaign that favoured improvised explosive devices. Here, a Canadian explosive ordnance device team measures the ‘blast seat’ of one such device near a choke point dubbed “The Arches” in the west end.

Significant changes occurred between late August and October 2005, indicating that there was a shift in Taliban operational thinking. The first was the discovery of a ‘cooking pot’ IED cache in the Loy Wala area after a number of these devices had been detonated in a Kandahar City market. In this case, the targets were civilians, not the security forces. The second and more spectacular was the use of suicide vehicle-borne IEDs in which a vehicle, be it bicycle, motorcycle, donkey cart, car or SUV, was packed with explosives and detonated by the driver in an act of suicide. A ‘SVBIED’ or suicide vehicle-borne IED was used to attack a Canadian PRT patrol on 5 October 2005; this was the first use of such a device against Canadian forces.

Suicide vehicle-borne IEDs were qualitatively different from other attacks. First, the idea that a human being would commit suicide to kill Canadian troops was sensational enough for the media to warrant increased attention. This only benefitted the insurgents and their cause – there is no such thing as bad publicity. Second, the explosive power of these devices and the havoc they wrought on a densely packed urban environment was more terrifying than an improvised mine blowing up a police truck in a remote district like Ghorak. The combination of these elements – mass damage, the generation of widespread fear, morbid media interest in spectacular forms of death – changed the IED war. What had been a tactical device designed for tactical effects now became a tactical device that had tactical, operational and strategic effects all at once, overnight.



Photo Credit: DND AR2005-A01-238av/BIED5Oct05

By late fall, the opposition employed suicide IED attacks, including suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. Here, a provincial reconstruction team patrol in its Gun Shield Kit G Wagons awaits the EOD team on Highway 4 near 'no-drug' mountain.

Tactically and operationally, the PRT patrols had to alter their procedures and increase security, which reduced the number of sorties they could do. In turn, it reduced the number of times the OGD personnel could go out and do their job, which had potential knock-on effects on programme delivery. This 'sortie rate' could and did improve once the patrols got comfortable with the new procedures, but the IED threat introduced a new level of danger that increased negative psychological effects on the whole process.

In terms of operational and strategic effects, the generation of an atmosphere of fear in the city seriously reduced public support for the government, and reduced the willingness of unprotected aid agencies to operate there and in the province. The curtailment of aid and reconstruction projects in Kandahar meant that the government would lose even more credibility with the population, who had been promised aid and reconstruction. This situation could be, and was, exploited by the insurgents not only in the province but also throughout southern Afghanistan. That bought the enemy time to target the population and intimidate their local leaders. This is exactly what happened in Shah Wali Kot district from August to October 2005.

IEDs and suicide vehicle-borne IEDs, in effect, introduced a great deal of friction into the coalition's effort to stabilize Kandahar province. Between September 2005 and January 2006, the PRT Patrol Company and the EOD teams responded to over 20 IED-associated incidents in Kandahar City. The Patrol Company, in its lightly armoured G Wagons, was attacked on four occasions, three of which resulted in severe wounds and death of Canadian personnel. The year 2005 marked the start of Canada's six-year fight against the enemy's IED cells in Kandahar province.

The 2005 Elections

The NAPCE elections process was starting just as the Canadian PRT arrived. TF Gun Devils assessments concluded that the enemy military forces in Shah Wali Kot were disrupted and that any overt threat to the election would come from the Baqi network in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. The actual level of enemy anti-elections activity in the province, however, took different forms. A JEMB team was threatened in Pashmul, Zharey district. There were several assassinations in September in the elections run up: one in Panjwayi with two mullahs gunned down; another in Shah Wali Kot with three government workers killed. Subsequent to those attacks, the district chief in Khakrez, an elections candidate, and three of his bodyguards were murdered. Another government worker was killed in Arghandab. The detonation of IEDs in a Kandahar City market was thought to be part of the intimidation campaign.³¹

CTF Bayonet saw PRT activities in the coordination and reconstruction realm as contributing to the success of the elections in a very broad sense. Any positive steps taken to support or assist the Afghans were deemed part of this effort. Aside from routine operations, however, the PRT contributed in other ways.

The PRT, working with TF Gun Devils, played a role in the establishment of the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC). This organization was originally set up to handle the Afghan National Army, Afghan police, National Directorate of Security and coalition security force coordination during the elections. The Afghan National Army's Provincial

Reaction Force was prepared to intervene anywhere the insurgents threatened the polling process. The Joint Coordination Centre was so successful that it became a permanent fixture of the coalition security apparatus by 2006 and continued in various forms well past 2011.³²



Photo Credit: Author

Another important Provincial Reconstruction Team function was assessing the population's attitudes toward reconstruction, government and insurgency. The psychological operations section, led by Sgt Reg Obas, was responsible for this task.

The PRT Patrol Company and the EOD teams were prepared to deploy to any incidents in the city during the elections. The lack of substantial coalition forces dictated this role. The Election Support Force, an ad hoc NATO organization that surged into the country for the 2004 elections, would not be surging to the south. A single American light infantry battalion, with its four companies, was brought in and scattered throughout Regional Commands East and South. One company was stationed at KAF as a QRF for the province.³³ There were four understrength infantry companies to handle election security for Kandahar province, one of which came from the PRT.

The level of election violence on 18 September 2005 was minimal. There were conflicting views on why this was so. Some Taliban leaders in Quetta announced in a radio broadcast that there would be a cease-fire during the elections. Not all Taliban commanders agreed and were prepared to go ahead with their plans. At the same time, HiG spokesmen said that they would disrupt the elections no matter what the Taliban did. Coupled with this was a shortage of funds –and Taliban money was not getting where it needed to go in the province. This lowered the motivation for some local commanders or sympathizers to mount attacks. One cannot rule out the overt disruptive operations in Shah Wali Kot by TF Gun Devils and the security measures put in place in the city by the Afghans, the PRT and coalition forces. The combination of these factors clearly gave the Quetta Shura some pause. The Taliban leadership backed off from its plans to attack polling stations. The Quetta Shura

decided to send in some new leadership and IED capabilities after the election, a move that likely indicated a lack of confidence in its existing command and control relationships.³⁴

Even so, voter turnout in Kandahar was among the lowest in the country. Of 744 952 registered voters, 25.3% of them voted. Oruzgan was bad at 23% but Zabul was worst, at 20.1%. Helmand, which would become an extremely problematic province in 2006–2007, had 36.8% voter turnout. The rest of the country was greater than 50%, in some cases, in the 60% range.³⁵

This low turnout could be in part attributed to Taliban violence and intimidation. However, when the PRT sent out CIMIC and psychological operations patrols after the election, they learned that the combination of a lack of government presence in the rural areas coupled with police corruption (in some cases police extorted money from people so they could vote) was producing a serious loss of confidence in the government in some districts. Indeed, the unequal distribution of aid and reconstruction resources by the provincial government, something seriously aggravated by tribal dynamics, was providing momentum to this discontent.³⁶

Disarmament and Demobilization Programmes

The heavy weapons cantonment programme was successfully implemented in Kandahar province at some point prior to the arrival of TF Gun Devils and the Canadian PRT. Camp Sherzai, the 1/205 Brigade headquarters located near KAF, held T-55 tanks, BMP infantry fighting vehicles and a variety of multiple rocket launch vehicles in varying stages of maintenance and decay. In 2005, the next stage of the DDR process was underway and, once on the ground, the PRT became involved in reporting on the Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) programme through its contacts with the provincial governor. Where heavy weapons cantonment and DDR focused on large militia formations, DIAG looked at smaller armed entities. It was one thing to take away and canton the 30 or so tanks under the control of the Kandahar militias, but it was another to identify and then disarm 20 or 30 armed militia that swore allegiance to a local commander in the hills or to a narco baron. It was also an anathema to Afghan culture where every man is supposed to be a warrior. A rifle is seen as a basic component of his identity.

In general, the idea was to coax the Afghans into processing such people through DDR, and give them a choice of joining the Army or the police. If a particular group proved too reticent, a provincial government DIAG committee was supposed to apply peer pressure and other non-violent means to get the job done. The PRT CIMIC team provided the coalition representative to the committee. The DIAG process in Kandahar was slow and subject to manipulative local politics. Like everything else, DIAG became part of the larger power dynamic between the tribal confederations, tribal groupings and their leaders. The PRT believed with some justification that caches of arms remained deliberately unidentified by entities hedging their bets.³⁷

The PRT was also involved in observing the 15th Division ammunition storage issue. This massive Soviet-era bunkered storage facility northeast of the city had been hit hard during the air campaign in 2001. There were ongoing attempts by demining crews to get into the area so that remaining ammunition could be destroyed or salvaged for Afghan National Army use. Concerns had been raised about illegally armed groups, not just the insurgents, accessing the facility. The PRT CIMIC team worked with various Afghan government and non-governmental organization entities to reduce the threat posed by this problem.³⁸

Policing

As for policing, the two RCMP officers at the PRT prioritized an assessment of the state of law enforcement in Kandahar. Sharia law, under the Taliban, was medieval and brutal. The pre-Taliban legal system, like the bureaucracy, had completely collapsed. There was a prison. There were people in uniform carrying weapons that were called ‘police.’ However, no readily apparent ‘connective tissue’ linking policing to law to courts to incarceration existed. There was, in effect, no legal system outside the Pashtunwali social code and between it and the new Constitution.³⁹

The reality was that most of the ‘police’ in Kandahar province were militia – fighters that had been ‘DDR’d’ and ‘DIAG’d.’ The Border Police was, essentially, Abdul Raziq’s private militia given vehicles and uniforms and then labeled ‘Border Police.’ Similarly, the Highway Police on Highway 1 were former AMF associated with at least three local commanders who extracted ‘tolls’ on truck traffic.⁴⁰

The problem was that the 2001 Bonn Agreement policing pillar, for which the Germans accepted responsibility, had not extended itself to the provinces. So what had been going on for three and half years? The Germans, as one observer put it, “designed and built a ‘Mercedes’ but it could not leave Kabul. It was slow, tedious and disconnected from the other [development] processes.” The German plan had no ability to mentor the police outside Kabul once they passed through the newly established police academy and deployed. When the U.S. State Department discovered what was going on in 2003, State established an emergency programme and contracted DynCorp to set up regional training centers with retired American police officers. One of these was established in Kandahar near KAF. DynCorp, however, was not contracted to assist the police in the field or backstop their non-existent logistics system – they just handled basic training.⁴¹



Photo Credit: Author

The RCMP members at the Provincial Reconstruction Team also worked hard to build up the local police as much as they could, using their limited resources. They were assisted by the incorruptible Colonel Hussain and his son Niaz Mohammad, who would later be grievously wounded while assisting a Canadian patrol.

In late 2004, the Rumsfeld Pentagon questioned the State Department and DynCorp on police effectiveness, but did not get the answers it wanted and insisted on a better programme. When the Canadian PRT deployed in 2005, they discovered that the Military Police platoon under CTF Bayonet had been designated a Police Training and Assistance Team and that a Mobile Training Team from Kabul periodically showed up to assist.⁴² These were the first concrete steps by the American military to try recovering the policing programmes from what was increasingly viewed as a development process collectively bungled by the Germans, State and DynCorp. The lack of a development strategy for Afghanistan during the 2001–2004 period clearly played a role in this problem, but the underfunding of the German programme and its constrained approach was also at issue.

Some police had been through DynCorp's Regional Training Center, but most had not. The RCMP officers decided to focus on assessing who had done what training, where the Police Sub-Station were, who controlled them and how they were supported. Coordination and recommendations could only be made after a picture had been established.

What emerged was not encouraging. There were ten sub-stations in the city – almost none of them would be inhabitable in winter by Canadian standards. Most of the personnel were not literate, not all had weapons, there were no communications systems and few vehicles.

The insurgents had compromised at least two of those sub-stations, one of them ‘controlling’ the Golden Arches area on Highway 4. It was evident that the Chief of Police for the city did not control his own department, such as it was. The RCMP estimated it would take two months to train a constable and 18 months to train a sub-station commander. There were too many outside ‘players’ in policing and there appeared to be little or no coordination among them. Local power brokers, who wanted to keep their private militias or use the police as a cover for their own activities, exploited this state of affairs. Effective and professional policing was, in the estimation of the RCMP, years away.⁴³

As for the justice system, it appeared to be non-existent. The RCMP noticed that local mullahs played a role in dispute resolution, but there was little understanding in the PRT of how religion factored into it. The Italians, responsible for the justice pillar of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, had no representatives at the PRT or even in Kandahar. At least the policing front had an imperfect State/DynCorp structure propping it up. There was no such equivalent for the legal system.



Photo Credit: Author

Provincial Reconstruction Team patrols acted as a delivery system for the Other Government Departments, collectively called the ‘OGDs’. Here a Royal Canadian Mounted Police member assesses a future site for a Police Sub-Station.

Development Programmes

The PRT was involved with an array of development activities. Broadly put, these were divided into short-term projects and long-term programmes. In general, the aphorism “give a man a fish he can eat for a day, teach a man to fish he can eat for a lifetime” corresponded to aid and capacity building respectively.

Some development projects tended to be handled by American Civil Affairs personnel from TF Gun Devils and Canadian Civil-Military Cooperation personnel from the PRT. American Special Forces also had their own Civil Affairs team but it had a different emphasis. Coordination between all three was minimal, in part because each American commander had their own Commanders Emergency Response Programme money. Canada had nothing similar until Col Bowes was able to convince DND to establish the Commanders Contingency Fund.

The national aid organizations handled both projects and programmes. There were three operating from the PRT: CIDA, USAID and the British DFID. The USAID representative, Ashley Abbott, had access to significantly more money than CIDA or DFID. DFAIT was also supposed to be involved in projects and programmes that had a demobilization and demilitarization dimension because CIDA in Ottawa did not want to be involved with anything that smacked of coercion, like policing, prisons and justice systems.

Other players in Kandahar province that were not part of the PRT included UNAMA, which had a regional office in the city; UNAMA was sometimes inactive in the province because their headquarters in Kabul periodically deemed the security threat to be too high. There were some 30 or so non-governmental aid organizations operating in Kandahar. Few had dealings with the PRT because they styled themselves as neutral entities in the war.

As we will recall, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development programmes, specifically the National Solidarity Programme with its Provincial Development Committee and the Community Development Councils, were supposed to be operating in Kandahar by 2005. They were not. In theory, a Provincial Development Committee was supposed to be in place to coordinate NSP projects. It was not. The reasons for that state of affairs related to a combination of Governor Asadullah Khalid's lack of bureaucratic capacity, his personal focus on security matters in the province and politics between Kandahar power brokers who were trying to hold on to what they had in the face of the shifting sands of influence in the province.

In addition, even if there had been a functional Provincial Development Committee, no one figured out, prior to the arrival of the PRT, exactly how the solidarity programme, development committee and community councils would interact with projects and programmes already established by the task forces with their Commanders Emergency Response Programme money, CIDA, DFAIT, DFID, USAID, UNAMA and the 30-plus uncontrollable non-governmental organizations. This situation only became apparent several months into the PRT's tour.

Consequently, Col Bowes, Glyn Berry from DFAIT and Michael Callan from CIDA set out to cajole, coerce and influence the power structure to accept the establishment of a Provincial Development Committee. This did not happen during the course of the first Canadian PRT's tenure and forced the Canadians and their allies at the PRT to develop other approaches.



Photo Credit: Author

The British Department of Foreign International Development representative, Niki Palmer, is seen working with CIMIC officer Major Sanchez King during a patrol in the remote Maruf District.

Without the Provincial Development Committee and the Community Development Councils, there would be no means to get the monies that were about to come into Kabul through the ANDS down to the province in 2006. In effect, the spout would be closed until the Kandahar power structure would accept the development committee and community council structures.

The role of the PRT became even more critical under these conditions and forced Callan, Berry, Bowes, Abbott and Mathias Tut from DFID and the other players to work closely together to develop workarounds for projects and programmes while still pushing for NSP implementation. Col Bowes established a ‘PRT synchronization meeting,’ which acted as a pseudo-Provincial Development Committee. Callan played a key role in conceptualizing a means to prime the NSP ‘pump.’ This was called Confidence in Government. The PRT representatives generally agreed that the sources of insecurity in the province included anti-government and Taliban forces that were responding to political marginalization or behaving passively in the face of the Taliban. There were disputes over land registration, grazing rights and water rights. There was youth unemployment. The rule-of-law structures were non-existent or corrupt. Then there were opportunistic criminal elements.⁴⁴

The task forces could go after the overt anti-government forces, but the PRT was to be used to target the underlying causes of the apathy and corruption and to make contact with the Afghan people, not just their leaders. The key was the community level. The problem was that there was not enough information about the communities in the province. The PRT needed a ‘map’ of the justice system. It needed to know who owned what land, what was disputed and why. This would take at least three months. The police needed resources, it was clear, but the need for mentoring teams for judges, lawyers and court staff was not addressed in any systematic fashion.

Confidence in Government was designed to:⁴⁵

1. build a trusting, enabling environment more receptive to national programmes;
2. give remote areas tangible cause to support the direction and legitimacy of the Afghan government;
3. develop direct networks between insecure communities and the provincial government; and
4. promote the utility and effectiveness and therefore legitimacy of the democratic process and its latest incarnation – the Provincial Development Committee.

The method was to provide block grants from the Provincial Development Committee (thus getting buy-in from the power brokers) to spend on locally identified priorities. Community leaders working with the Provincial Development Committee would determine these priorities. A Confidence in Government Steering Committee (i.e. a pseudo-Provincial Development Committee) would coordinate with the governor. Confidence in Government was, in an unspoken way, designed to address the fears of local power brokers that government ministries coming down from Kabul could shoulder them aside and take charge, as much as it was to address the crushing need to link the outlying and susceptible communities with Kandahar. In time, presumably, this would all act as a catalyst for greater NSP involvement. Again, it took several months to determine the state of affairs in the province, but the ‘selling’ of Confidence in Government was underway by November-December 2005.

Why was DFAIT even involved with a provincial-level government organization from a non-industrial nation? Even Glyn Berry, DFAIT’s representative at the PRT was mystified. It appeared to some as though the NATO PRT model included a diplomat (like the German PRT in Konduz), therefore all PRTs should have a diplomat. In the Canadian case,

DFAIT personnel were to be involved in ‘governance’ – but diplomats, and Glyn Berry repeatedly admitted this, have no specific training in provincial or community-level governance. Diplomats exist to interact between governments. As CIDA in Ottawa did not want to have anything to do with overt security programmes, it fell to DFAIT representatives to take up that portfolio because they did not really have anything else to do except act as the Canadian civilian connection to the provincial governor.

As a result, there were a number of DFAIT international programmes administered by Glyn Berry and his assistant Erin Dorgan. One of these was the Human Security Programme, but only \$200 000 was made available by DFAIT in Ottawa. In addition, DFAIT looked at spending money on the Women’s shura and the Women’s Legal Education Group. DFAIT representatives saw their role as backstopping Confidence in Government and mentoring the potential Provincial Development Committee.⁴⁶

When it came to development ‘heavy lifting,’ however, USAID brought so many financial resources to the table that it dwarfed anything the Canadian aid organizations contemplated. In addition, USAID had been working in the country and the province since 2002, so it had continuity with the power structures, which the Canadian agencies lacked. With money came influence, and the close cooperation between Ashley Abbott and the other representatives was leveraged as much as possible in some quarters toward larger goals. Again, the issue was coordination and with no Provincial Development Committee, it was left up to personal relationships at the PRT to deconflict USAID projects and programmes with the other agencies.

The close working relationship that USAID had with the American task forces highlighted another problem that replicated itself in the Canadian context. Where did Civil Affairs or CIMIC projects stop and USAID and CIDA projects and programmes begin? CIMIC was historically designed to assist a manoeuvring force with maintaining good relations with the civilian population. In West Germany during the Cold War, Canadian CIMIC compensated German farmers when tanks destroyed fields or roads during exercises. American Civil Affairs in Vietnam was designed, in effect, to bribe locals to assist with information collection and generate temporary good will. The Americans in Afghanistan were vertically and horizontally integrated to a certain extent. If, for example, a U.S. Special Forces task force needed more aid money beyond its Commanders Emergency Response Programme funding, it could get assistance from the USAID representative who was used to dealing with projects as well as programmes. In the Canadian case, CIDA had no real experience working with the Canadian Army (at least before Kosovo and then only to a limited extent) and was institutionally inclined toward programmes, not projects.



Photo Credit: Author

This was the Panjwayi District Shura, seen here in December 2005 during discussions with USAID's Ashley Abbott who had a large check book for road construction. Panjwayi district would, in less than a year, become the focal point of Canadian Army operations until 2011.

At the PRT, CIMIC capacity was limited and as such was used in a liaison role with the other agencies. Maj Sanchez King and his staff acted as Col Bowes' 'eyes and ears' when it came to projects and programmes. In time, the CIMIC team became involved with niche areas – when others were not mandated or were unwilling to. DIAG and the ammunition disposal programmes were two of those.

Kandahar Provincial Power Politics⁴⁷

During the course of the first Canadian PRT's tenure in Kandahar, the shadowy outlines of how relative power worked in Kandahari society started to emerge for Col Bowes and the other PRT members who were in contact with senior and second tier Afghan officials. Canadian soldiers who served in the Balkans, Middle East and Africa generally understood that there were surface cosmetics to any conflict, that everything at first looked black and white. Over time, however, experienced personnel learned that any conflict had multiple layers to it, just as the Canadians in Kabul were able to do. There were always those who profited from instability – and had no qualms about generating it as required. Others supported both sides in case one or the other won. Still others wanted revenge for past wrongs, perceived or otherwise. It was only through 'time in theatre' that these motivations and aspects emerged for the Canadians engaged in Afghanistan. The existence of the PRT in 2005 accelerated that process and allowed a first look at what was going on underneath the surface in Kandahar and southern Afghanistan.

There was little doubt that an organization called the Taliban existed, and that the Quetta Shura based in Pakistan controlled insurgent operations, but there was some debate in 2005 as to how extensive the movement was. There was equally no doubt that the Taliban had allies among other jihadist groups and was more than prepared to use violence to accomplish its objectives, whatever those were. At the same time, however, the Taliban operated against a backdrop of several groups vying for influence in Kandahar province. Collateral damage, as it were, from their activities seriously affected Canada's ability to accomplish national objectives in Kandahar over the next five years. It is crucial that the power structure be examined here so that the effects can be understood in subsequent chapters.

In 2005, the Canadian and other governments put significant research effort into studying tribal divisions and structures in southern Afghanistan. However, none of it really drilled far enough down beyond certain key personalities and what tribe they belonged to. It was generally understood that there was a rivalry between the Ghilzai and Durrani confederations of Pashtun tribes, and that some tribes supported the Taliban while others did not, but it was a basic means of understanding what was happening. This view dominated in coalition circles from 2002 to 2004 though there was debate between civilian and military intelligence professionals and among the academic anthropologists. (See Figure 9-4)

FIGURE 9-4:
Provincial Reconstruction Team
Understanding of Tribal Groupings in
Kandahar Province,
2005

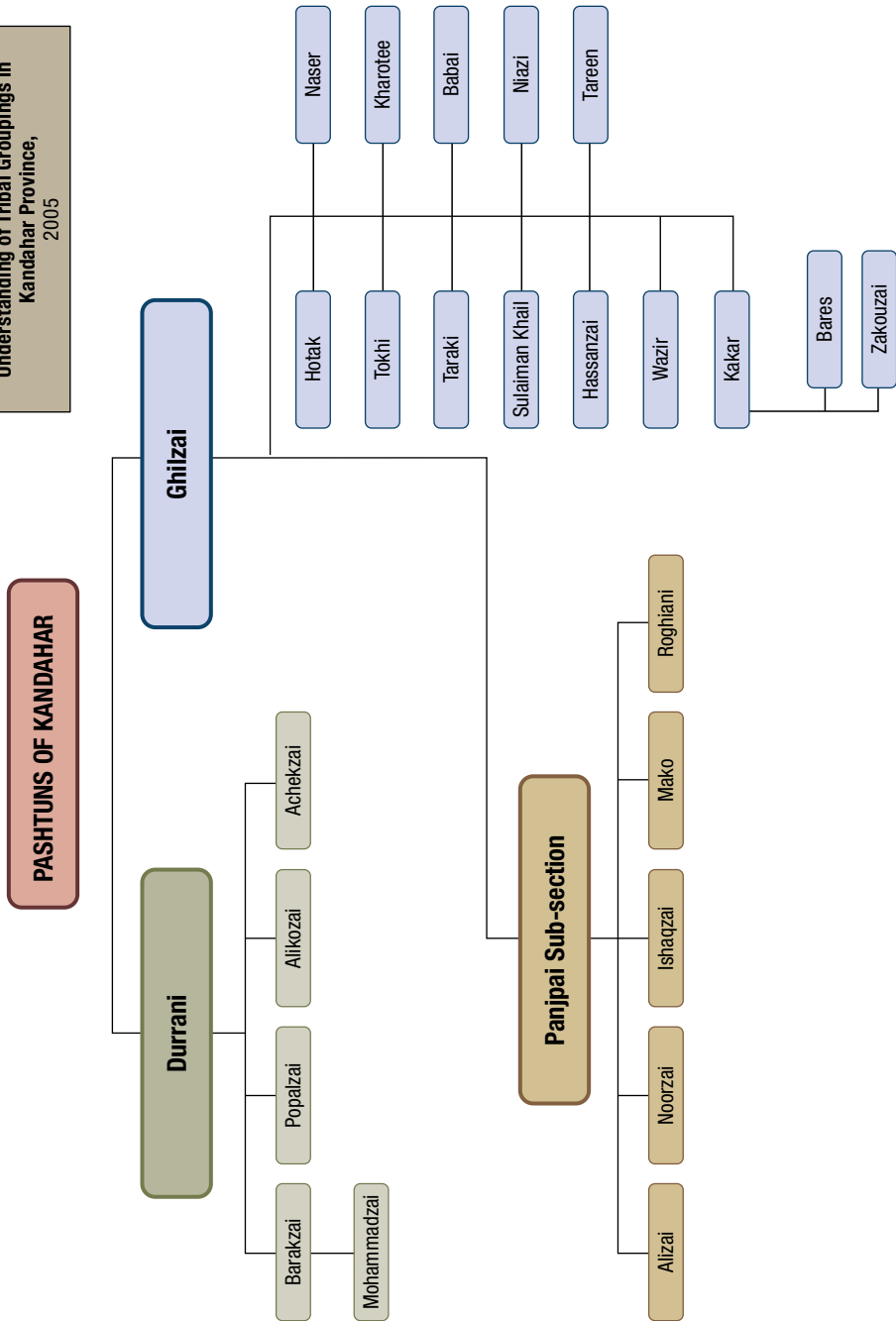


Figure 9-4: Provincial Reconstruction Team Understanding of Tribal Groupings in Kandahar Province, 2005

Source: "Good Governance in Tribal Areas Kandahar Research Project" 12 September 2005

An overly idealistic outlook seriously hampered early Canadian attempts to analyze what was going on. In the early days, Canadian tribal rivalry analysis did not seriously examine what, exactly, the various power brokers wanted or even the detailed specifics of what their extracurricular activities were. The RCMP civilian police personnel at Camp Nathan Smith made early attempts to do so in late 2005 but this did not see widespread distribution at the time. In a general sense, it all revolved around money and influence just as it does in Canada or any other country. The difference was that there was no firm line drawn between the licit and the illicit in Kandahar. The near post-apocalyptic state of affairs in the province made the place ripe for the picking whether it was narcotics, trucking contracts, security provision, or aid distribution on behalf of non-governmental organizations or national aid agencies. Indeed, all factions were involved to some degree or another with all of these activities.

The Kandahar scene was dominated by three primary rivalries, though there were many sub-tribal rivalries that played into events. The Sherzai family, who was Barakzai, was the first to be supported by U.S. Special Operations Forces in 2002; family members were viciously anti-Taliban, having been the first to be overrun by the Taliban in the mid-1990s. Gul Agha Sherzai was governor until 2004 and he used his power to benefit his supporters during that time. President Karzai (a Popalzai) eventually displaced the Sherzais and an ostensibly neutral governor was installed in 2004. The Sherzais were in a weakened position but still had connections to protect their interests in the province. One of these was Habibullah Jan, the leader of Senjaray in Zharey district and a member of parliament. There were others behind the scenes as well but they kept a low profile and moved into areas that the Popalzais were not dominating. (See Figure 9-5)

The new governor in 2005 was Asadullah Khalid, a Ghilzai from Ghazni. However, Hamid Karzai hedged his bets and was able to manoeuvre his brother Ahmad Wali Karzai (AWK) into leading the Provincial Development Committee. The tensions between Khalid and AWK waxed and waned over the next few years, but it was clear to all who was more influential. That said, Khalid and Karzai had their own extra-curricular activities that they were able to deconflict to their mutual benefit.

Then there was Mullah Naqib, the leader of the Alikozai tribe based in Arghandab district, the 'kingmaker' of the city. The Alikozais had supported the Taliban when they took over Kandahar City from the Barakzais in 1996 and then in 2002 they changed sides and turned Kandahar City over to the Barakzai power structure. When the Popalzais removed Gul Agha Sherzai and the Barakzais in 2004, Naqib and the Alikozais supported the Popalzais. Simply put, Naqib would determine who was the more powerful and side with them. This came with some bona fides as Arghandab was a key district geographically vis-à-vis Kandahar City, and whoever controlled Arghandab increased their chances of controlling the city.

FIGURE 9-5:
Power Brokerage in Kandahar Province,
 2005-2006

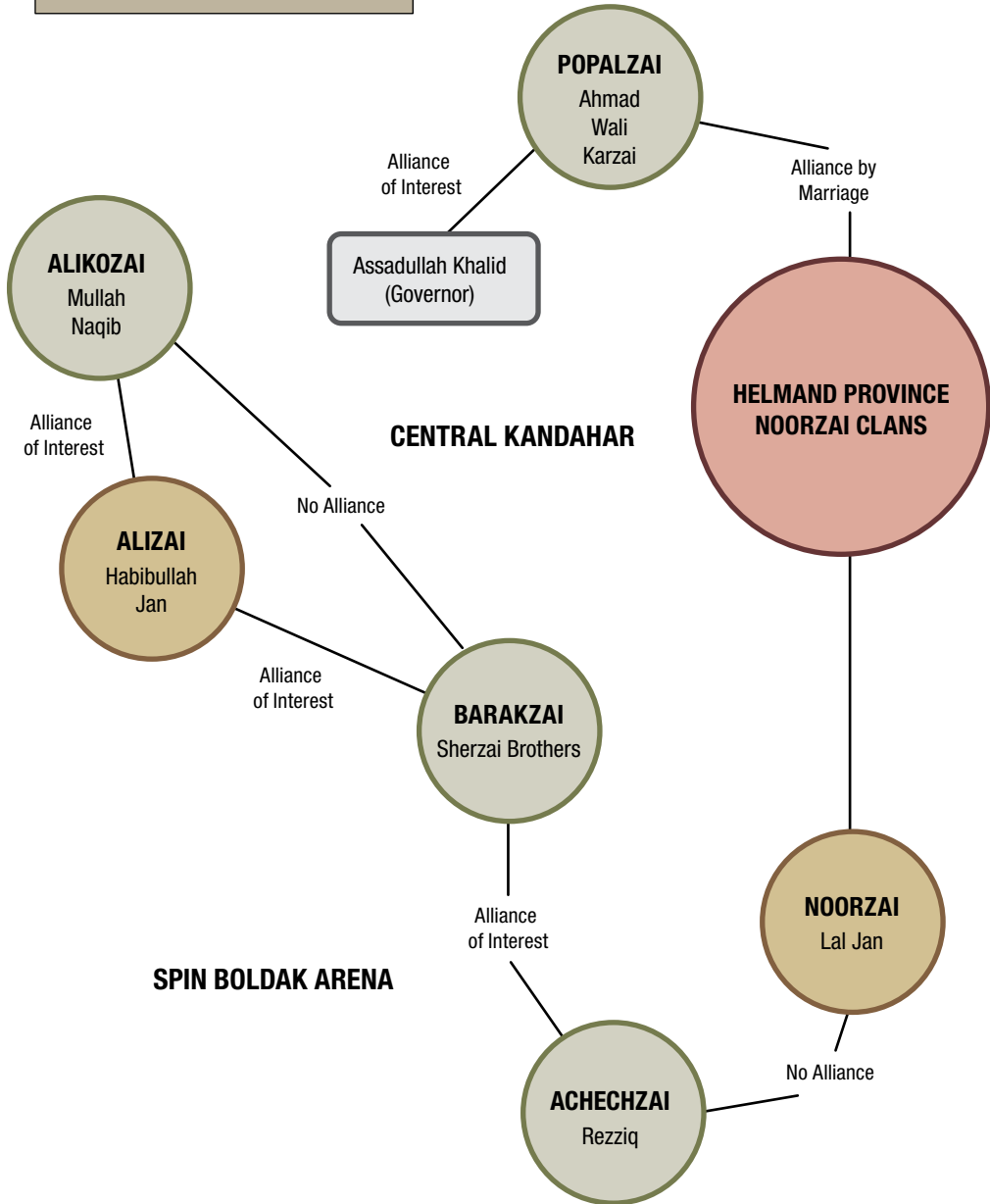


Figure 9-5: Power Brokerage in Kandahar Province, 2005-2006

Further south in Spin Boldak, there was an ongoing Noorzai–Achakzai rivalry in that vital trading town. The antagonists included Haji Lal Jan, a Noorzai, and Abdul Raziq, an Achakzai. Each had a private militia that was ‘DIAG’d into ‘police.’ There was a *détente* of sorts, but no one was sure how long it would last. All anyone knew then was that Raziq had connections to the Popalzai structures and everyone hated the Noorzai leadership for openly siding with the Taliban in 1994.

Naqib and the Popalzai representatives eyed each other warily, and at the same time neither would openly have any truck with the Sherzais or their surrogates. What did emerge was a status quo whereby the Barakzai power structure retained certain economic interests without harassment by the Popalzai leaders in order to keep the peace. It appeared at the time that Naqib tried to remain above the fray as much as possible. That said, however, there were always other members lower on the ladder in all three factions who caused trouble from time to time. And of course, the Barakzais wanted revenge on both the Alikozais and the Popalzais for their various betrayals in 1996 and 2004.

The main tribal issues in early to mid-2005, broken down by district, were assessed as:

- Ghorak District: Alikozais dominate, minor tribe grievances;
- Khakrez District: Alikozai stronghold with grievances against the Barakzais because of lack of development aid under Governor Gul Agha Sherzai;
- Kandahar City: Barakzais held political power until Popalzais put in by Karzai resulting in significant Barakzai–Popalzai tensions; Alikozais got the secretary-level positions in the bureaucracy;
- Panjwayi District: The Alikozais in the district upset by lack of developmental aid from the Barakzai administration;
- Shah Wali Kot: Barakzai–Popalzai tensions;
- Maywand: Noorzai and Ishaqzai stronghold; and
- Daman: Achakzais dominate, minor tribal grievances.

It is crucial to understand here that these rivalries did not exist in a vacuum separate from the Taliban and their activities. This is what was so hard for many Canadian troops, let alone the Canadian population back home, to understand and accept. From time to time, fresh, young newly deployed Canadian intelligence analysts, CIMIC, and psychological operations personnel would declare, as if it were the first time, that power broker X had Taliban connections. The fact was, all of the factions had Taliban connections, and some members were even related to senior and mid-level Taliban leaders. In some cases, they would go so far as to taunt each other on the radio during operations. This was not the Allies versus the Axis in Normandy, nor was it NATO versus the Warsaw Pact in a divided Germany. The situation was akin to those depicted in “The Sopranos” or “Deadwood” television series; the PRT slowly learned by late 2005 that Kandahar had order without law.

Provincial Reconstruction Team Operations by December 2005

It is impossible to list every long-range patrol or key interaction during the course of the six months of this PRT rotation. The important issue here is that the variety of patrol types, be they information operations, policing liaison, CIMIC, key leadership visits or district assessments all contributed to establishing what was going on at all levels of society in the province. In effect, the PRT became a social ISTAR battalion as much as it was a delivery mechanism for projects and programmes. In a culture where understanding, hospitality and long-term relationships were currency, the first PRT deployment in 2005–2006 set Canada up for success in the province.

The insurgency from September to December 2005 exhibited distinct shifts from month to month. In September, there were IEDs on Highway 1 in Zharey and on Highway 4 south of KAF. A cluster of contacts occurred in the area between Panjwayi district and southwest of Kandahar City, where TF Gun Devils identified an insurgent support ‘ratline’ coming in from the cells operating in Zharey district. From mid-September to mid-October, the action was clustered all along Highway 1 in Zharey district, with more and more contacts north of the city in Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts. The airfield was rocketed on occasion. From mid-October to mid-December, the level of activity on Highway 1 was still high, rockets continued against the airfield, and a new cluster of IEDs started on Highway 4 between the airfield and the city. When TF Gun Devils surged into the northern districts, they had running gunfights with insurgent cells on six occasions. Over in Maruf, the French special operations forces contained another cluster of cells by the end of December. There were problems in Panjwayi district: the clinic in the town of Nakhonay was burned; the school in the nearby town of Chalghowr was burned; and the school custodian in Belanday was kidnapped and hung.⁴⁸ (See Figures 9–6 to 9–8)

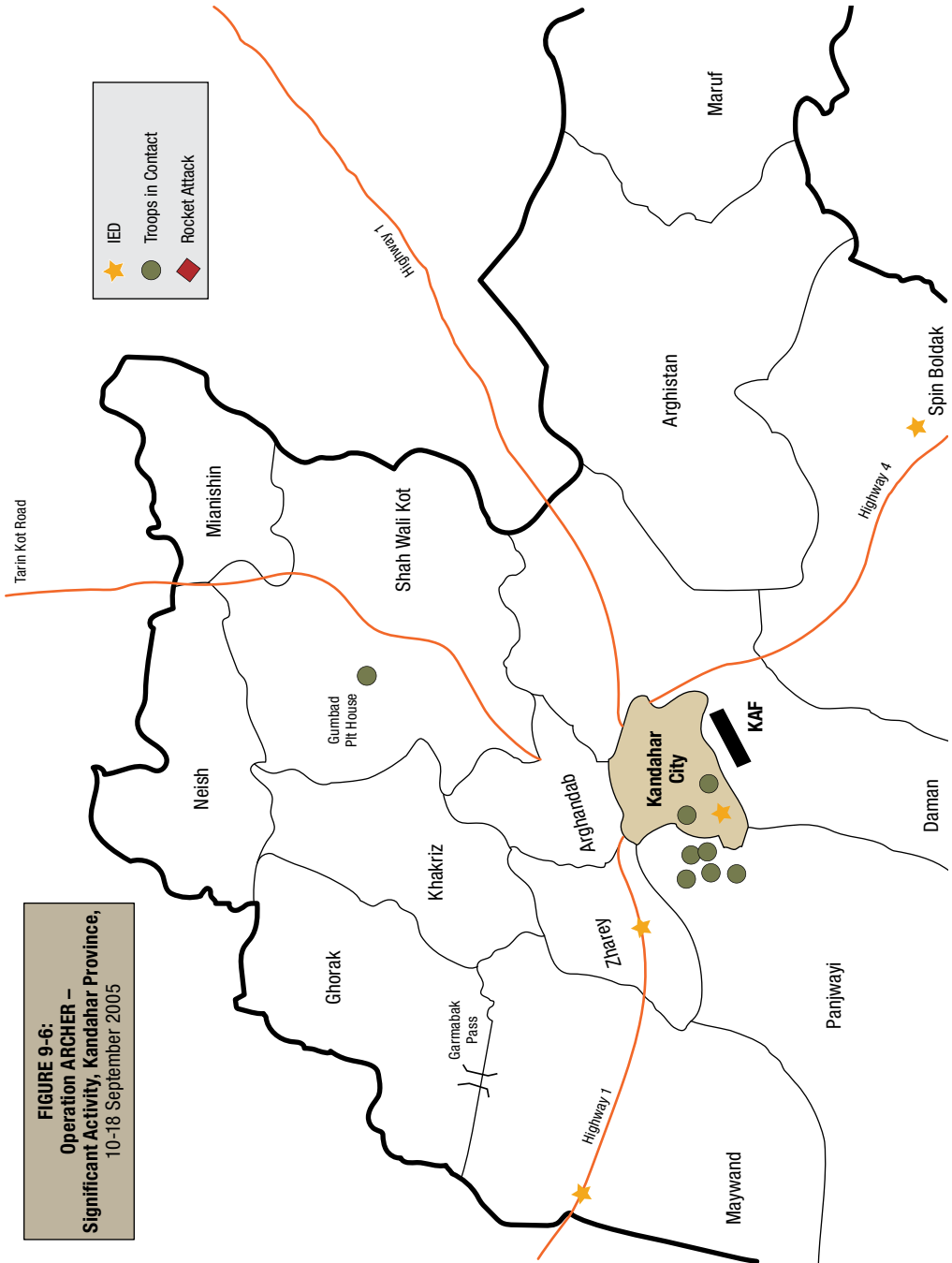


FIGURE 9-6:
Operation ARCHER –
Significant Activity, Kandahar Province,
10-18 September 2005

Figure 9-6: Operation ARCHER – Significant Activity, Kandahar Province, 10-18 September 2005

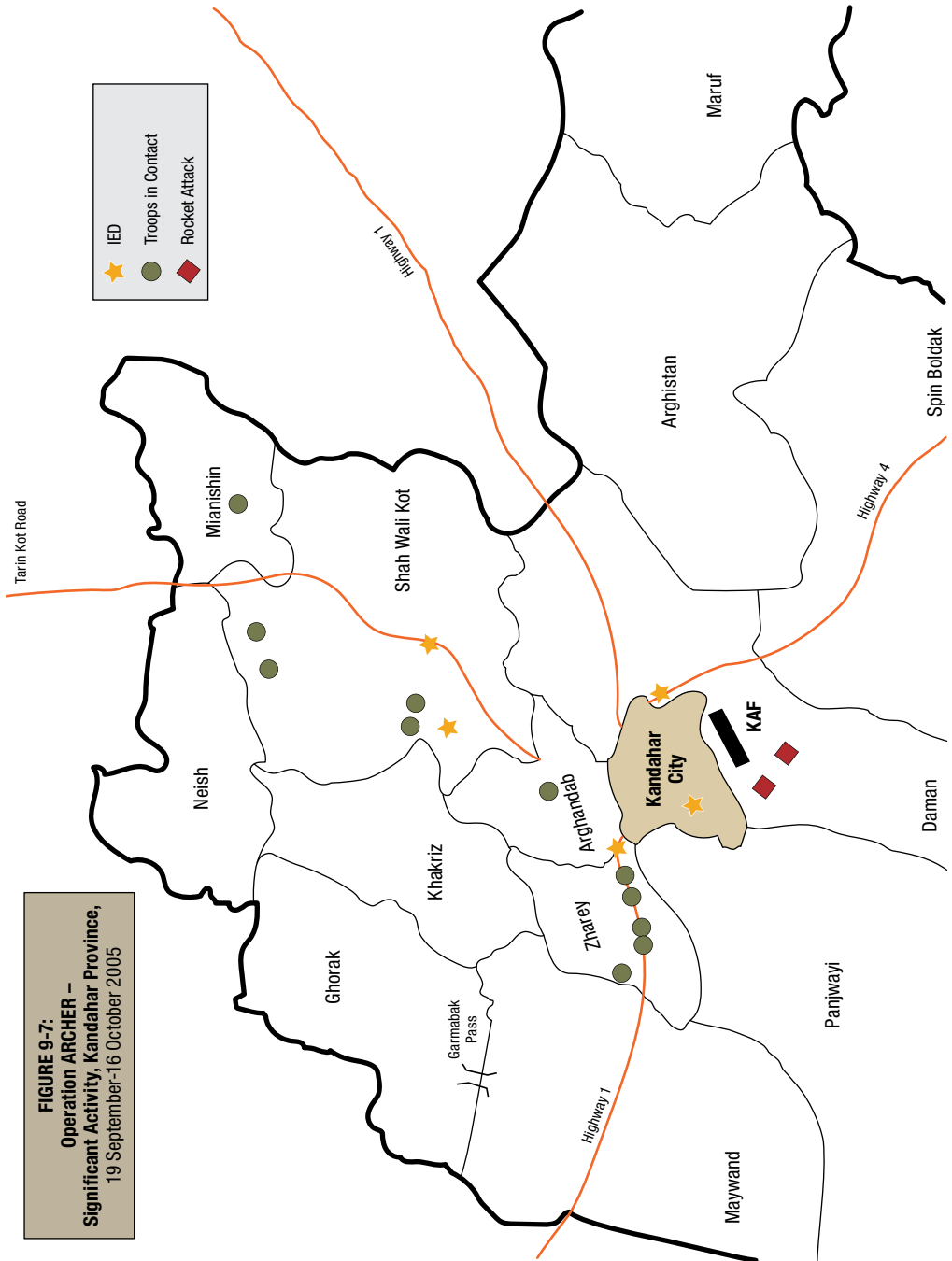


FIGURE 9-7:
Operation ARCHER –
Significant Activity, Kandahar Province,
19 September-16 October 2005

Figure 9-7: Operation ARCHER – Significant Activity, Kandahar Province, 19 September-16 October 2005

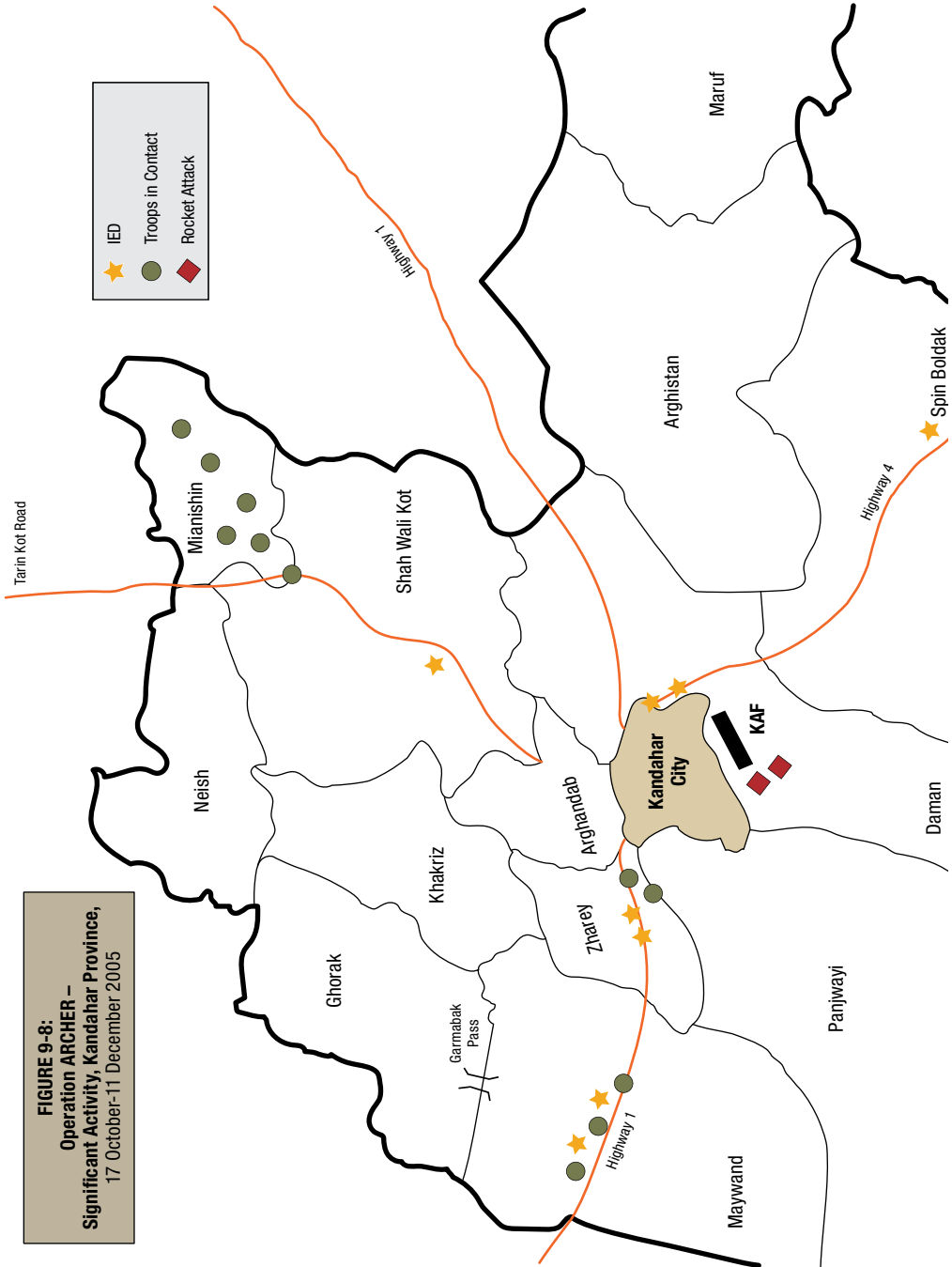


FIGURE 9-8:
Operation ARCHER –
Significant Activity, Kandahar Province,
17 October-11 December 2005

Figure 9-8: Operation ARCHER – Significant Activity, Kandahar Province, 17 October-11 December 2005

There were concerns at the PRT, however, that the incoming Combined Task Force Aegis and TF Orion did not understand PRT operations or what the PRT had evolved into since it arrived in summer 2005. The incoming organizations, established at the same time the PRT was deploying, had their own ideas as to what the PRT was for and were going to dramatically alter the structure and command relationships. This was viewed with some trepidation by elements in the PRT who were only just starting, after six months, to gain fragile insight into the closed world of Kandahari society and how influence worked within it. They were concerned that the newcomers would destroy this fragility and credibility would have to be rebuilt, which would further delay development in the province.⁴⁹

What was apparent to the PRT leadership after six months was that the PRT did not have enough capacity by itself. It needed to be bigger and have more money. Indeed, Col Bowes referred to this PRT as “roto null” instead of Roto 0, which is the usual designator for a first-time deployment. It was a big recce and it only scratched the surface.

To be fair, there were so many problems with Kandahar and its people. The province was in a country that had been at war for over 20 years. The damage to infrastructure, culture, religion and demographics was considerable. Where to start? And with whom? That said, there was myopia in the Canadian approach and the seeds of future problems were sown early on. First, Ottawa bureaucrats imposed culturally insensitive priority projects and programmes on their PRT staffs, and placed unrealistic restrictions on what money could be spent and on what, or by whom. They did not understand how to buy influence and influence was critical to getting anything done in the Afghan environment. There was resentment that the PRT was run by “the military” and not a civilian department. There was a willful lack of recognition in some quarters that the PRT was a counterinsurgency unit involved in a war, that there was no neutrality and Canada had taken a side. Instead of Canadian agencies working together as Canadians toward Canadian government goals, there were people in Ottawa who appeared to be more closely aligned with non-governmental organizations and UN mentalities and objectives. After spending some time in Kandahar, the field representatives of these departments developed a view that did not, perhaps, correspond with the departmental and personal agendas in the Ottawa bureaucracy. Elements in the Ottawa bureaucracy were unwilling or unable to accept these realities.

The Glyn Berry Assassination

On 15 January 2006, a suicide bomber detonated his Toyota van next to a G Wagon transporting ambassador Glyn Berry after the patrol escorting him entered Kandahar City on its way in from KAF. Berry was killed in the blast and three soldiers seriously wounded; the explosion was so large, it blew the G Wagon across the road, peeling back the roof and opening the vehicle up like a can. MCpl Paul Franklin, a medic, worked to save the lives of his fellow soldiers even though both of his legs were injured severely enough they would have to be amputated later. Sgt Joe Brink entered the vehicle while it was on fire and worked on another wounded soldier until he could be extricated from the G Wagon. Brink was decorated with the Meritorious Service Cross for his actions.

The effects of this assassination were significant. Canadian OGD operations at the PRT were suspended and OGD personnel on leave had their leave extended indefinitely. Security measures were re-examined. Some insisted that it was a lucky “hit,” that the enemy could not have known who was in the vehicle, while others disagreed.⁵⁰ Reticent bureaucrats in Ottawa, whether out of concern for the safety of their personnel or out of relief that they could use this as an excuse to extract themselves from PRT operations, refused to send civilian personnel back to Kandahar unless the Canadian Forces acquiesced to their force protection demands, which involved airlift. Unfortunately, without Canadian helicopters on the ground, this was a problematic process and involved working out a deal with the Americans and British for access to theirs. The arrangements took months to sort out and for a very critical spring 2006, non-RCMP supported projects were suspended, including the critical Confidence in Government initiative. All programme momentum slowed down and then stopped. The USAID representative and the check book that went along with her re-aligned with a U.S. Special Forces task force instead of the PRT.⁵¹

Col Bowes handed over the PRT to TF Orion in February 2006. The Berry killing was the start of a long, hot, dangerous year where the fate of Kandahar City would be decided. Most development was suspended while the enemy mounted an escalating attack on the city’s surrounding districts. With a single suicide IED strike, the insurgents put back provincial-level development nearly a year. There would be no coordinated provincial-level development programming in Kandahar until early 2007. To put that in perspective, that was nearly six years after the Bonn Agreement and four years after the National Solidarity Program was implemented.

ENDNOTES

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4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. See: U.S. State Department, "Nature of the Threat of Terrorist Abuse and Exploitation of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs)"; Thomas Bamforth, "Political Complexities of Humanitarian Intervention in the Pakistan Earthquake," *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (16 January 2007); Evan F. Kohlmann, "The Role of Islamic Charities in International Terrorist Recruitment and Financing," DIIS Working Paper No. 2006/7, Danish Institute for International Studies (2006).
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14. PRT briefing to the author (Kandahar, December 2005).
15. "TF Gun Devils/Kandahar PRT Back brief on Elections" presentation.
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18. Interview with Colonel Don Bolduc (Carlisle, 26 May 2009).
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CHAPTER NINE

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34. TF Gun Devils briefing to the author (December 2005).
35. Elizabeth Speed, "SAT-A Assessment of the 18 September Election Results."
36. Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
37. Ibid.
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41. Calbos interview.
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43. KPRT O&I Briefing; author's observations (11 December 2005).
44. CIDA briefing to the author (Kandahar, December 2005).
45. Ibid.
46. PRT O&I Briefing (Kandahar, 11 December 2005).
47. This section is based on information collected through his Afghan connections during the author's multiple deployments to Kandahar from 2003 to 2011.
48. Ibid.
49. This view was expressed to the author while at the PRT (Kandahar, December 2005).
50. It is the author's hypothesis, based on eleven years of observing the Kandahar political scene and having met Glyn Berry days before he was killed and discussed details of that scene with him, that Berry was assassinated in part because of his forceful inquiries into illicit activities conducted by elements of the Kandahari power structure. This hypothesis is shared by several Canadians who worked intimately with elements of the Kandahari power structure from that period and after. At least one member of the Canadian board of inquiry into the killing dismissively (and improperly) labels any retroactive attempt to analyze the Berry assassination as 'conspiracy theory.' Although there was a board of inquiry conducted in early 2006, in my opinion its members lacked long-term experience with the political, economic and tribal environment in southern Afghanistan, experience that was crucial to comprehending the Byzantine nature of why and how such an assassination could take place. Indeed, the Board of Inquiry report is less than exhaustive and possesses a glaring lack of context that might have illuminated these factors. In my professional view, the exact sequence of events that led to Berry's death will likely never be fully known given the demise of those Afghans who were involved in it.
51. This aspect of events was noted by PRT personnel and conveyed to the author (Summer 2006).

ODYSSEY:

COMBINED TASK FORCE AEGIS AND TASK FORCE ORION, JANUARY-AUGUST 2006¹

The decision to commit a Canadian-led brigade headquarters and a mechanized infantry battle group to southern Afghanistan was taken against the strategic and operational context of 2005. In that construct, there was a political need to facilitate NATO Stage III expansion; a practical need to assist and support the PRT with its reconstruction efforts; and a desperate need to improve Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Once CTF Aegis and TF Orion deployed in early 2006 these organizations discovered that the situation in southern Afghanistan had drastically changed while they were preparing to deploy. From February to August 2006, CTF Aegis and TF Orion were confronted with a steadily deteriorating security situation that climaxed with a series of dramatic battles west of Kandahar City. At the same time, British forces deployed into neighbouring Helmand province and walked into a metaphorical insurgent buzz-saw. On numerous occasions, Canadian forces were re-deployed from Kandahar province to prop up the British position while insurgent efforts in Kandahar developed a dangerous momentum. The fight for the south was on as the insurgents demonstrated that the coalition's and the government's position was much more precarious than it had generally been believed.

What few realized in 2005 was how much the Taliban and its allies had been able to recuperate in Pakistan and then ambitiously proceeded with their project. The nature and scope of this new threat only became evident to the coalitions through CTF Aegis and TF Orion's activities during the first half of 2006. In effect, the enemy wanted to generate a crisis in and around Kandahar City and then exploit the situation in order to gain popular support with the objective of seizing the city, if the conditions were right. That would presumably lead to a collapse of the government position in the southern half of the country and pave the way for the return of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, who would exploit the coalition failure for their purposes globally. In essence, an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM or ISAF defeat in and around Kandahar had potential strategic effects.

Combined Task Force Aegis and Task Force Orion

CTF Aegis, led by BGen David Fraser, was unlike any other Canadian headquarters deployed in the past 50 years. Although it was technically a brigade-sized headquarters, CTF Aegis had functions, a span of control, and an area of operations much larger than a brigade headquarters from the Second World War did. CTF Aegis was responsible for Regional Command (South), that is, the entirety of southern Afghanistan. (See Figure 10-1)

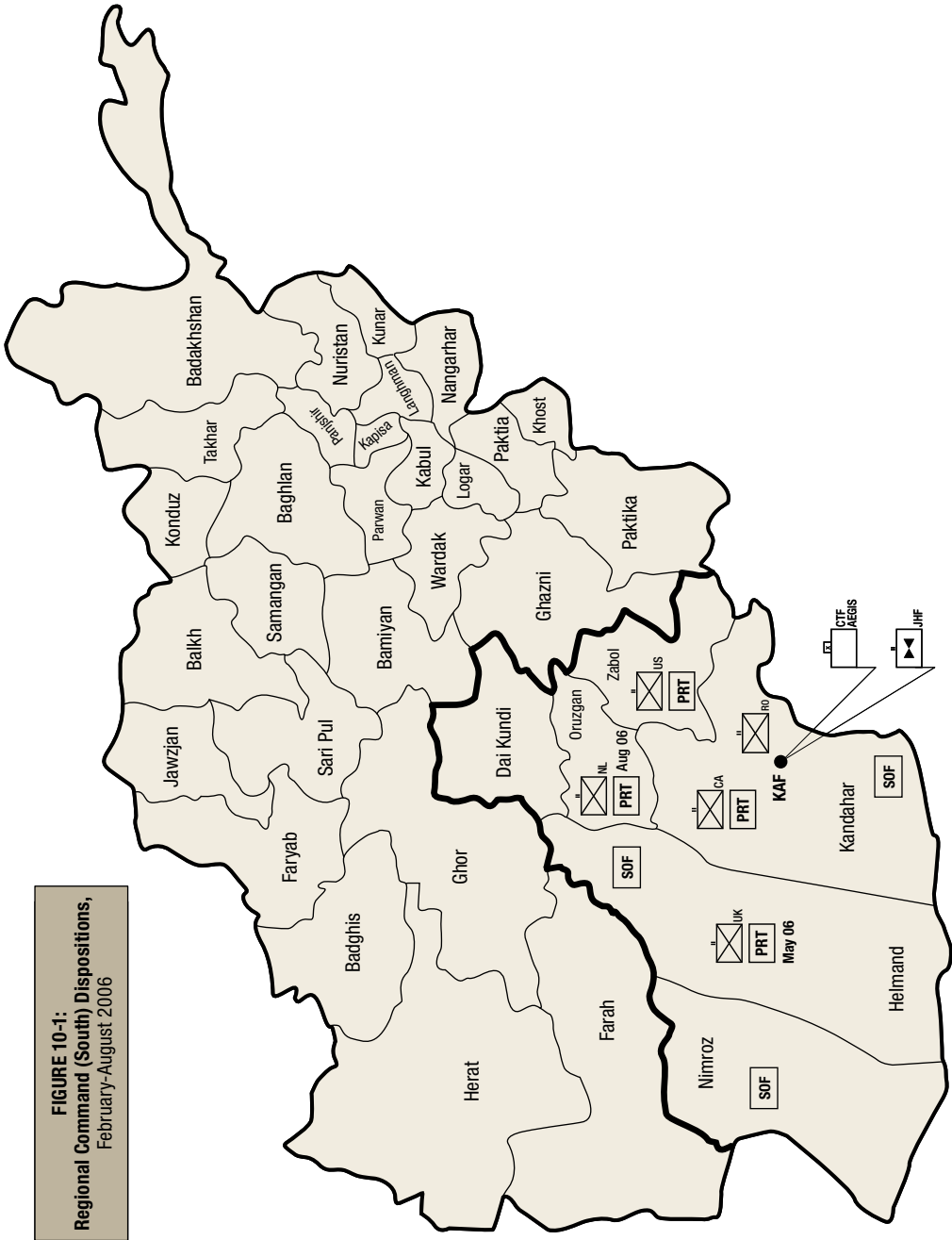


Figure 10-1: Regional Command (South) Dispositions, February-August 2006

There were, ultimately, five national battle groups: Canadian, British, American, Dutch and Romanian; and four PRTs: Canadian, British, American and Dutch. In February 2006, however, only the American, Romanian and Canadian battle groups, and the Kandahar and Zabul PRTs were in place. Coalition SOF were working to prepare the way in Helmand and Uruzgan provinces, while Nimruz and Daikundi provinces were “economy of force” areas that had no coalition presence. CTF Aegis reported to CJTF-76, the American divisional-sized headquarters located at Bagram Air Base and based on the 10th Mountain Division divisional headquarters. CJTF-76, which reported to CFC-A which in turn reported to U.S. CENTCOM. Canada maintained liaison and staff officers in all of these headquarters to provide situational awareness and to protect Canadian interests.

CTF Aegis had the usual staff sections (personnel, intelligence, operations and logistics) but these were augmented with new ones. There was a Joint Operations Centre to handle the entire region. Aegis had an expanded and augmented planning system with a J3, J5 and J3/5, each designed to handle planning out to several days, weeks and months. There was an organization designed to coordinate PSYOPS, Public Affairs and other influence activities, and another to liaise with the plethora of organizations mentoring the emergent ANSF, which included NATO Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, American ETTs, Civilian Police contingents from the PRTs, and contract police trainers from DynCorp. Aegis also included a Development Advisor, Christina Green – she worked with the PRTs, the CIMIC branch, and the Afghan authorities who were responsible to coordinate and deconflict development and reconstruction. The Political Advisor, Pam Isfeld, worked on governance and diplomacy aspects of the mission. The bulk of the headquarters was Canadian, but personnel from other NATO nations, including the Danes and non-NATO allies like the Australians, made significant contributions too.

Most importantly, CTF Aegis was a coalition focal point for what were euphemistically called “enablers” – national intelligence collection systems that ranged from signals intelligence and electronic warfare systems to unmanned and manned aerial vehicles. Information from these systems was “washed” or parceled out to Aegis from the nations through their liaison staffs and, from there, integrated as required into planning and warning. For the most part, this meant plugging into the vast multi-billion dollar American global intelligence collection and analysis apparatus.²

CTF Aegis boasted joint fires and joint effects organizations designed to coordinate lethal and non-lethal support to operations. All forms of fire support from artillery, mortars and aviation to close air support were coordinated through CTF Aegis and in some cases pooled for use throughout the area of operations. For example, a Canadian M-777 gun detachment might be located in British-commanded Helmand province firing on targets provided by an American task force.

As for aviation support, there was supposed to be a pool of helicopters (American, British, Australian and ex-Canadian Dutch CH-47 Chinooks) that CTF Aegis units could draw on, coordinated by Aegis. For the most part, though, national task forces had to put in bids to use any of these systems and priority usually went to the owners. This highlighted, on a daily basis, the severe Canadian deficiency in rotary-wing air support and made Canada, as it had in Kabul, dependent on other nations in this area. There were long-term ramifications for this state of affairs.

Another deficiency was CTF Aegis's inability to effectively coordinate with the variety of special operations organizations operating in the Regional Command (South) battle space. For the most part, this applied to the higher-tier SOF leadership hunters but also, to a certain extent, the Tier II Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) operating in Regional Command (South) as well. CTF Aegis did develop a cordial relationship with TF 31, an American task force, and TF 42, the British SOF task force. This latter relationship was leveraged to great effect during counter-terrorism operations in Kandahar City. CTF Aegis had virtually no relationship to Canadian SOF activities. On at least two occasions, however, SOF organizations conducted operations in the Aegis battle space in an uncoordinated fashion, which resulted in both civilian casualties and casualties to the SOF. This was the inauspicious start of what would ultimately become a valuable, mutually profitable, conventional SOF relationship in the years to come.³

TF Orion, led by LCol Ian Hope, was a battle group based on 1st Battalion, PPCLI. It was under the command of CTF Aegis. Structurally, it had three infantry companies: A and C Companies, led by Maj Kirk Gallinger and Maj Bill Fletcher respectively, both equipped with LAV III, came from 1 PPCLI, but B Company from 2 PPCLI, led by Maj Nick Grimshaw, was equipped with a mix of G Wagon, RG-31 and LAV III. The artillery battery of four M-777 guns came from A Battery 1 RCHA and was commanded by Maj Steve Gallagher, while Maj Trevor Webb led 11 Field Squadron from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment. Capt Bryan Flemming from 12 RBC was in charge of a troop of Coyote reconnaissance vehicles. TF Orion was unique from other battle groups in that the decision was made to place the Kandahar PRT under its command. This made for awkward command and control relationships, and it was eventually abandoned by August 2006, but the idea was to have B Company, which was equipped on lighter scales, act as the force protection company for the PRT and its OGDs. Parallel to the CTF Aegis Joint Operations Centre, TF Orion maintained a Tactical Operations Centre at its plywood compound at KAF for provincial-level operations.⁴

The NCE for southern Afghanistan operations was commanded by Col Tom Putt. In effect, the NCE was also TF Afghanistan and commanded a signals squadron (unofficially called TF Mercury), an electronic warfare troop from 2 (EW) Squadron, the All-Source Intelligence Centre, and the NSE led by LCol John Conrad, which will be described in detail later on.

These were not coalition organizations and remained under Canadian command. Even though CTF Aegis was Canadian-commanded, it did not automatically control all Canadian organizations in Afghanistan even though BGen Fraser was double-hatted as both Commander TF Afghanistan and Commander CTF Aegis.

The Combined Task Force Aegis Campaign Plan and Concept of Operations

Having just come out of a frustrating coalition environment in Kabul, and having had experience in Bosnia with Stabilization Force as a multinational division commander with NATO, General Rick Hillier was adamant that Fraser's headquarters produce a framework document. First, he wanted to avoid "roto-itis," whereby every incoming commander and staff created their own plan driven by personality factors; it was possible that the coalition would be in place in the south for 10 years and thus continuity was crucial. The second was that there was a need to have interface between the American system and this small coalition system as it was less 'authoritarian' and more 'democratic.' That reflected the political sensitivities of getting the British and the Dutch to join the coalition down south.⁵

Fraser also had significant experience with coalition environments as a deputy to a French commander in UN Protection Force in 1994-1995, as a battle group commander in Bosnia in 1997, a planner for Operation KINETIC in Kosovo, and with the United States Northern Command. It was crucial, from his perspective, to ensure that the Canadian national objectives were enshrined in any larger plan early on and that they had coalition members 'buy in.' Generating Canadian strategic objectives was compounded at the time by a completely chaotic planning situation in Canada. At this time, the DCDS was drawing down its international command and control mandate and transferring it to the new CEFCOM, which was in the process of standing up. As a result, Hillier's direction to Fraser was, literally, "Dave, build me a nation."⁶

In the case of CTF Aegis, it reported to an American division with its plan, which in turn was operating under an American corps headquarters with its own plan. There was going to be a transition from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to NATO ISAF during Aegis's tenure. That organization had its own plans as well. Then there were the Canadian OGDs: where did they fit in? Fraser put Maj Steve Carr to work in August 2005. The objective was to have a coherent document that had 'buy in' from all of the players. At the same time, Fraser solicited input from the Canadian OGDs in Ottawa, and from the British, Dutch and Americans. The draft was adjusted as required. This process continued right up until February 2006 when CTF Aegis deployed to KAF.⁷

Taking into account the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the campaign planning underway in CFC-A and CJTF-76, Aegis planners considered the British campaign directives and the NATO ISAF Operation Plans. They specifically noted that

The lead nation concept that was adopted for Security Sector Reform (SSR) at the Bonn II Conference has not produced anticipated results. It has suffered from a lack of resources, strategy, and a sense of urgency. Coordination between lead nations has been minimal....the training of the Afghan National Police has suffered from under-resourcing and the lack of a comprehensive, integrated plan. These limitations, when combined with insufficient progress in judicial reform, make the establishment of the rule of law undeliverable in the immediate term.⁸

This made Afghanistan, particularly the south, vulnerable to “violent political jockeying.” A vulnerable border coupled with the Afghan drug trade “may jeopardize efforts on all fronts to build a stable national government” and leave the country vulnerable to terrorists and “the remaining Taliban elements.” Canadian strategic goals remained the same as they had all along since 2001: contribute to international security; provide political, economic and military support pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions; assist the Government of Afghanistan with maintaining security; assist with establishing a democratically elected and responsible government; and assist with reconstruction. The overall NATO and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM end-state was to have the Afghans controlling their own territory with their own security forces “led by a representative government formed through the political participation of the Afghan people.”⁹

The Aegis campaign plan saw opposition to these objectives coming from three angles: the Taliban, HiG, and Al Qaeda – as they “will continue their quest to oust coalition forces.” Planners believed that “unrelated and non-politicized warlords and drug networks will continue to assert themselves against the newly elected government.” Notably, “All three groups will not necessarily work together but will work to disrupt the development of democracy...and impeded the completion of the SSR program.”¹⁰

The Taliban’s objectives, according to the plan, were the “establishment of a conservative Islamic state.” The Taliban was seen to be supported by border communities and by international donors, though the authors of the CTF Aegis plan probably were not permitted to get into the details of Pakistani support for the movement in the planning language itself. Al Qaeda’s objectives related to promoting jihad and opposing “Western influence and presence in Islamic areas.” In that regard, the insurgent groups would conduct

focused attacks against Government of Afghanistan institutions, coalition and international organizations/non-governmental organizations targets in order to remove their influence from Afghanistan; and destabilize and disrupt the Government of Afghanistan’s ability to expand reach and authority. The end-state saw insurgent groups in a position to take over Afghanistan after the coalition has exited, and again, allow Al Qaeda to achieve sanctuary and use Afghanistan as a base for global terrorist operations.¹¹

That meant the enemy wanted to “re-establish theocratic control in Afghanistan,” and “re-install Taliban leadership under Mullah Omar and re-establish their Islamic Emirate.” CTF Aegis’s mission statement was, therefore, to “conduct full-spectrum operations in order to enable Government of Afghanistan efforts to defeat the adversary forces and create a secure, democratic, and self-sustaining Afghan nation-state.”¹²

How was the coalition going to do that? A critical aspect was the need to bring ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM together, that is, Stage III expansion. CTF Aegis was going to be the bridge for this move in that the headquarters would start off as an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM organization and transition to a NATO one in July–August 2006. Aegis looked at the entirety of the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and ISAF efforts, situated them within the context of the ANDS that was being mentored by the Strategic Advisory Team in Kabul and came up with a fusion of effort.

The CTF Aegis campaign plan, like the ANDS, resembled the NATO Stabilization Force’s Multi-Year Road Map. There were three lines of operations: Governance and Justice; Security and Stability; and Development. CTF Aegis forces would stabilize and transition to the Afghan security forces, while non-military engagement through OGDs, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations would build the development and governance structures synergistically with the coalition security forces – not independently from them.

The specific desired effects on each line of operation broke down like this:¹³

1. Governance and Justice:

- a. the provincial governments provide and improve the delivery of basic services, and develop and provide a credible civil administration;
- b. a judicial system is operating including jails, and the rule of law is implemented across Regional Command (South); and
- c. the people of Regional Command (South) accept the authority of provincial leadership and the Governors are capable of conducting and coordinating affairs with minimal international community assistance.

2. Security and Stability:

- a. the Afghan National Army, specifically 205 Corps is capable of coordinating and conducting sustained military operations with minimal coalition/ISAF support;

- b. the Afghan National Police is a credible organization, enforcing the rule of law;
 - c. the Afghan security forces have implemented an integrated border security plan;
 - d. insurgent and terrorist networks operating within Regional Command (South) are isolated and denied support base; and
 - e. warlords and illegally armed groups are reintegrated or marginalized.
3. Development:
- a. civil authorities direct provincial reconstruction in accordance with the priorities of the Government of Afghanistan;
 - b. local economy has sustained growth; and
 - c. use of arable land in Regional Command (South) is increased, supporting an agrarian economy.

CTF Aegis established key operational tasks common across its forces to accomplish these objectives. The first one was to partner with the Afghan National Army and police to conduct joint planning and execution of operations. Those operations were to be intelligence-cued, designed to interdict infiltration of Afghanistan, and to deny the insurgents sanctuary in southern Afghanistan. Information operations would support these efforts “to positively influence and gain the support of” the population. The maintenance of “dialogue with provincial leaders, civic authorities and tribal leaders,” supporting the Provincial Coordination Centre (an entity established for the 2005 provincial elections but continued by the Gun Devils and then TF Orion) and the amnesty mechanism Program Takhim-e Sohl (PTS) were also deemed critical tasks. For the PRTs, the key task was to “facilitate the development of the Afghan architecture of governance” and the “delivery of development projects and programs.”¹⁴

In terms of time, Aegis planners envisioned relief in place with CTF Bayonet in February-March 2006, followed by ‘Full Spectrum Operations’ from March to July involving interdiction operations across the northern mountainous parts of Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul provinces, coupled with PRT operations south of these interdiction areas. Concurrently, the plan saw frontier interdiction operations around Spin Boldak in Kandahar and the southern border of Helmand province. In June-July, Aegis thought that it could move into the northern

areas and use intelligence-cued operations to track down and destroy the networks operating there. The enemy would be disrupted some distance away from Kandahar City and Highway 1 while Stage III expansion went into effect in July-October. Following the transition in October, there would be “an indeterminate number of rotations. Over time, the successful development of Government of Afghanistan capacities will result in measures and deliberate transfer of security and stability responsibilities.” Moreover, in time, “progress in socio-economic development will create a sound basis for a self-sufficient, sustainable Afghan state.”¹⁵ The American commanders Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry in Kabul and Maj Gen Ben Freakley at Bagram signed off on the CTF Aegis Campaign Plan and the staffs initiated preparations to deconflict the plan and the ‘Mountain’-series of operations that were about to commence throughout the country.¹⁶

Supporting Combined Task Force Aegis and Task Force Orion

Logistics support for Canadian forces in southern Afghanistan during the first half of 2006 was hampered and severely strained by the decision to “template” the ISAF Kabul model NSE onto Kandahar. This meant taking the logistics company (that is, administration company) manpower positions that were integral to the infantry battalion and giving them to a greatly reduced logistics battalion, then augmenting with the Canadian Forces Contractor Augmentation Program. The Kandahar NSE was capped at 300 military personnel and no contractors in 2006, and the addition of contractors in the NSE was not entertained on the first rotation. LCol John Conrad had to figure out the optimal proportion between transportation, supply and repair functions.¹⁷

As with previous rotations, an artificially imposed manpower cap caused serious problems. Kandahar was not Kabul. LCol Conrad noted that “it called for a fundamentally different logistics concept. The Kabul NSE operated mainly on the notion of a hub and spoke. The supported units drew on support from a static logistics base. The Kandahar NSE had to be protectable as a matter of routine sustainment for TF Orion.”¹⁸ It defied belief to suggest that an NSE, optimized for the urban environment of west Kabul (an area of operation of about 400 square kilometres) and supporting two major sites, could be employed in a province the size of Kandahar (225 000 square kilometres by comparison) to support four sites outside the airhead over broken terrain during protracted mobile operations ranging to Helmand province and back. Let alone the fact that the entire logistics system was under frequent attack from rockets at KAF to IEDs against convoys and ambushes against mobile recovery teams. Vehicle maintenance alone demanded upgraded capacity – especially when LAV III tires and axles were severely tested by the rocky ground and unpaved roads, wadis and tracks of the rural districts.

A similar situation existed on the ammunition front. In Kabul stabilization operations, there was almost no ammunition used except for range work to maintain skills. When TF Orion mounted combat operations in spring and summer 2006, the logistics system was not prepared for the rate of ammo used by the task force. Personnel were needed to move, store and maintain ammo stocks. Those personnel numbers were appropriate for Kabul (or Bosnia, or Kosovo....) but were not for the Kandahar environment where ammunition expenditure was necessary, not exceptional.¹⁹

Then there was the dispersed nature of TF Orion operations. At the start of the operation, TF Orion operated the Gumbad Platoon House in Shah Wali Kot district, and later FOB Martello. These facilities lay 100 kilometres north of Kandahar City. Then there was Camp Nathan Smith, where the PRT was located. FOB Wilson, later Patrol Base Wilson, was 25 kilometres west of the city. And, in time, TF Orion became responsible for a forward operating base down in Spin Boldak, 85 kilometres southeast of KAF. Resupplying these sites, which had to be done by ground convoys called Combat Logistics Patrols (CLP or 'clips') because there were no Canadian logistics helicopters, meant that there was increased wear and tear on the barely armoured 16-tonne Heavy Logistics Vehicle Wheeled Steyr trucks that the NSE employed. Fuel consumption dramatically increased for the force. This meant more fuel storage and more people to handle fuel, and so on.



Photo Credit: Author

The National Support Element relied on contracted Afghan trucking to handle logistics tasks that did not involve critical equipment or heavy protection. 'Jingle Trucks' like this one were in constant use supporting Canadian operations in Kandahar province during the course of the war.

In effect, the NSE was caught in an escalating spiral of requirements that it was not structured to sustain. LCol John Conrad and his people were pushed to the absolute physical and moral limits on all fronts, particularly after TF Orion was forced to deploy and operate in Helmand province on several occasions. This involved the creation of ad hoc supply and maintenance columns not unlike those used in the Western Desert in the Second World War. Such an activity could not be handled by CANCAP contractors, for example, so the personnel savings that were made in Kabul were unrealized in Kandahar. The logistics operation was closely integrated with TF ORION operations down to section-level fighting that made the use of contractors off KAF itself impossible.

Resupply operations were in some cases as hazardous as the engagements that the infantry companies got into. Vulnerable because of their slow speeds, large ponderous vehicles and limited protection, the NSE combat logistics patrol crews and mobile recovery teams fought on a front all of their own, in mobile columns and dispersed at forward operating bases throughout the province. Fortunately, LCol Conrad and the NSE staff had absorbed American lessons learned from Iraq, particularly the disastrous 507th Maintenance Company ambush in 2003, and prepared their soldiers for a similar environment. The NSE had its own infantry platoon for force protection, and all of its logisticians were capable of using the issued array of Canadian small arms and crew-served weapons.

A premium was also placed on vehicle recovery. On the surface, it would not be acceptable to leave a multi-million dollar fighting vehicle on the field of battle strictly out of cost considerations; such an act would be a public relations disaster. But this is where recovery during 21st century operations in Afghanistan differed from the Second World War. The enemy could use destroyed vehicles for information operations and they could also be exploited by their technical specialists to build better IEDs. Pictures of burnt-out LAV IIIs, for example, could readily be placed on the Internet as part of the insurgent's propaganda effort. On at least one occasion the personal effects of a crew that abandoned a vehicle were used by the enemy for PSYOPS purposes. In addition, Canadian armoured vehicles engaging in combat was a novelty to the Canadian media. It was possible that ill-informed or unaware media would use photos of destroyed vehicles and exaggerate the depth of the loss of a single vehicle. As a result, robust measures were taken to recover Canadian vehicles.

The NSE structure for 2006 also included a Camp Services Platoon to handle KAF-based administration. Transportation Platoon, with its up-armoured 16-tonne trucks, fuel bowsers and Bison armoured carriers, consisted of a mere 56 soldiers. Supply Platoon had 36 soldiers to support the entire contingent that ran on 40 000 different line items of equipment. Maintenance Platoon, with its Arnes trailers and Bison mobile repair teams and Heavy Logistics Vehicle Wheeled wreckers, was split into deployable mobile repair

teams and a heavy repair organization at KAF: it was augmented from time to time with personnel deemed to be on “Technical Assistance Visits” to get around the manpower cap. There was also an infantry platoon made up of personnel from several reserve regiments to provide convoy security. All in all, the NSE had 281 personnel. As LCol John Conrad noted:

With the small size of my unit, I had no comfort zone, no fat anywhere on the bone to meet an emergency, much less cater to soldiers being on leave in Canada....In the size of the unit we were mounting, there would be no redundancy, no excess capacity.²⁰

Signals support for the Canadian effort was beset with some structural challenges. During the Cold War, a brigade headquarters had a Signals Squadron and was geared towards mobile warfare. In Afghanistan, CTF Aegis had a fixed headquarters, support infrastructure and mobile forces. CTF Aegis also had to be able to communicate with Canada on the other side of the world. In addition, there were the Mobile Electronic Warfare Teams from 2 (EW) Squadron. Brigade Signals Squadrons were not doctrinally set up for or equipped to handle all four activities. All of the signals organizations and personnel in Kandahar were styled ‘TF Mercury’ at the NCE, but in reality 65 signals personnel were part of TF Orion and CTF Aegis, and the Mobile Electronic Warfare Team worked for the All Source Intelligence Centre. The strategic communication system detachments were located at KAF and in Camp Mirage, but it was unclear whether they reported to the Canadian Forces Joint Signal Regiment in Kingston, or to the NCE or both. There was notable lack of centralization of the signals effort in Afghanistan, which curtailed any long-range planning and forced a significant amount of improvisation.²¹

On the medical front, Canada accepted command of a multinational Role 3 hospital in February 2006. The existing “temporary” plywood structure next to the KAF runway that served as “Charlie Med” under CTF Bayonet and its predecessors for several years was augmented with several Weatherhaven shelters to become the Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit (Role 3 MMU). Commanded by Col Jacques Richard, the Role 3 MMU consisted of doctors, nurses, med techs, mental health specialists, physiotherapists and all manner of health care professionals from the main troop contributor nations in Regional Command (South). There were additional unit medical stations for Canadian units that were separate from the Role 3 MMU. Bison ambulances and medic teams were attached to TF Orion sub-units on a rotation basis. U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force helicopters once again handled medical evacuation from the field, as Canada was unable to provide those resources.

Intelligence support for Canadian operations in the early days of the Kandahar operations was somewhat problematic as the All Source Intelligence Centre at KAF and its relationship with the deployed units and formations was different from the one in Kabul. The synergy

between the All Source Intelligence Centre, the ISTAR Company, and KMNB in Kabul in 2003–2005 simply did not exist in Kandahar. CTF Aegis, for example, was not comparable to KMNB by any stretch of the imagination. There was no ISTAR Company – and that construct would not have worked in the geographically dispersed operations that TF Orion was conducting. Political factions in a singular urban environment were by no means analogous to complex tribal dynamics in several provinces. The All Source Intelligence Centre at KAF, commanded by Maj Mark Godefroy, arrived on the ground not structured to collect on and analyze the political dynamics of Kandahar province or the relationship between those dynamics and the insurgency. Understanding those important processes was left up to the PRT with its pair of intelligence personnel, who had no training in political analysis or tribal dynamics. The ASIC tended to be “red icon” driven, that is, focused on insurgent fighting units and not necessarily the political and social effects those units were generating on the population and the government.



Photo Credit: Author

Canada took the lead at the Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit at Kandahar Air Field in 2006 when Combined Task Force Aegis assumed command of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces in southern Afghanistan. The Role 3 MMU remained under Canadian command until 2010 and saved the lives of countless military and civilian casualties.

Indeed, many believed that the All Source Intelligence Centre was supporting Ottawa more than they did TF Orion. Yes, there were Mobile Electronic Warfare Teams from 2 (EW) Squadron with their associated specialist personnel operating alongside TF Orion and they were able to provide up-to-the-second data – but it was the slow process by which data were analyzed at the ASIC then disseminated to TF Orion that caused problems.

LCol Hope was not confident that ASIC could react in a timely fashion to his requirements, nor was BGen Fraser. As a result, both commanders tended toward informal measures to gain the information they needed to supplement the slower ASIC processes. In Fraser's case, he learned that the Joint Coordination Centre, an entity established back in 2005 to coordinate Afghan police, Afghan National Army, and coalition operations for the elections, was still operating. Originally located at the UN compound, TF Orion moved it to the Governor's Palace. Maj Harjit Sajjan, a reserve armoured officer with police experience, was assigned there; he subsequently tapped into a significant amount of information relating to Kandahar's power structure and the insurgency. This information provided insight into some of the areas the ASIC did not get into. Similarly, LCol Hope developed strong relationships with certain police leaders. These leaders operated their own HUMINT networks, which TF Orion was able to access. The S-2 shop at TF ORION and the S-2 shop at CTF AEGIS, with its access to American sources, tended to use information from a variety of sources and not just products provided by the ASIC.²²

The NSE and the ASIC both suffered from the same thing. Staff in Canada templated the Kabul experience onto the Kandahar environment under pressure from an artificial manpower cap and tried to make a square peg fit into a round hole. The commanders on the ground were left to figure out how to make that happen while under fire and the results were not always neat and tidy. Indeed, the Canadian ASIC was considered by BGen Fraser to be under performing for the first two months of operations, which resulted in the deployment of a four-man intelligence liaison team from Maj Gen Freakley's headquarters in Bagram to CTF Aegis so that American intelligence could be pushed to Kandahar. In April, however, the Canadian ASIC scored: it produced the most comprehensive analysis of insurgent 'ratlines' from Pakistan into Regional Command (South) seen so far.²³

Counter-IED Operations

The Canadian PRT was confronted in 2005 with a substantially altered threat environment. The insurgency employed suicide vehicle-borne IEDs throughout Kandahar City and its approach routes for several months and, by December 2005, IEDs were deployed against PRT and other coalition long-range patrols in rural areas. The rural bomb makers tended to use pressure plate and radio-controlled IEDs as singular devices, though TF Gun Devils had seen IEDs used to initiate complex ambushes in their area of operations.

The slow Canadian equipment acquisition process meant that TF Orion did not deploy to Afghanistan with any counter-IED equipment. By this point in the war, the Americans used a Route Clearance Package (RCP) to sweep roads ahead of convoys. An RCP consisted of a blast-resistant sensor vehicle that resembled a road grader; a huge six-wheeled angular

vehicle equipped with an arm carrying a sensor package and a “hand”; and an RG-31-like vehicle transporting an EOD robot. There were only so many route clearance packages to go around and it became yet another scarce enabler that Canada had to bid for. The lack of a Canadian route clearance package capability meant that LCol Hope had to decide on the level of risk that each operation would entail – risk increased if route clearance packages were not available. In an ideal world, the operational tempo would have been governed by the availability of route clearance package resources. But what if the enemy suddenly increased their optempo and overwhelmed TF Orion’s ability to respond with route clearance package resources? If higher headquarters insisted that all operations be accompanied by route clearance packages, and there were not enough available but the enemy increased their operations and forced TF Orion to respond, decisions had to be made and these had larger implications as to what was and what was not possible. TF Orion never cancelled an operation or closed a route due to lack of a route clearance package.

More fundamentally, there were not enough ECM transmitters to go around TF Orion. In later years, every Canadian vehicle carried its own ECM transmitter. In the first half of 2006, there was barely one transmitter for every five vehicles and in the early days, this proportion was worse: only 18 sets were available and those were inherited from the PRT. That meant that each convoy had to keep its vehicles within the invisible ECM “bubble” and ensure there were enough ECM-equipped vehicles to have coverage of the column. In many cases, the CIMIC and PSYOPS G Wagons in TF Orion were modified to carry the ECM equipment. If TF Orion wanted to maintain the operational tempo needed, there was always a risk as there was never enough ECM coverage for operations.

Canadian EOD capability initially remained similar to that employed by the PRT. Connections between various coalition counter-IED organizations continued to develop. The Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell continued to exchange valuable information with Canadian organizations on the devices and their employment and both built up databases and “signatures” of bomb makers. In early 2006 Canadian efforts coalesced when a technical assistance visit evolved into a Tactical Exploitation Team. This team, called TF IED Defeat, deployed on every IED strike that it could, depending on protection and transport, and assessed each attack to determine patterns of Canadian behaviour as well as enemy behaviour. This information was disseminated within the Canadian units so that they could improve their convoy tactics.²⁴



Photo Credit: Author

The constant competition with insurgent bomb makers forced the Army to constantly upgrade its vehicles. With the Iltis and G Wagon deemed too vulnerable, the RG-31 with a remote weapon system was acquired in 2006 to move Provincial Reconstruction Team patrols around the province. This one was subjected to a ball-bearing attack committed by a suicide bomber in Kandahar City in June 2007. The occupants survived with no injuries.

Early Task Force Orion Operations: Shah Wali Kot District

When TF Orion flowed into theatre in January 2006, the situation on the ground was not significantly different from the one TF Gun Devils and the PRT were engaged in in late 2005. The main insurgent threat was in the rugged Shah Wali Kot and Mianishin districts in northern Kandahar province. (See Figure 10-2)

These Taliban groups, supported through Oruzgan and Zabul provinces, were engaged in hit-and-run raids on Afghan outposts and facilities, and ambushing security forces and road construction crews when possible. IED use was increasingly prevalent. TF Orion moved into the Gun Devils facilities, including the Gumbad Platoon House which was situated to observe and, when required, project force into (or onto) a feature dubbed “The Belly Button,” a natural mountain fortress situated in western Shah Wali Kot. At this point, the Afghan government was attempting to establish district centres and schools in the northern districts, and there was a major road construction project snaking north from Kandahar City to Oruzgan. This was called Tarinkot road.

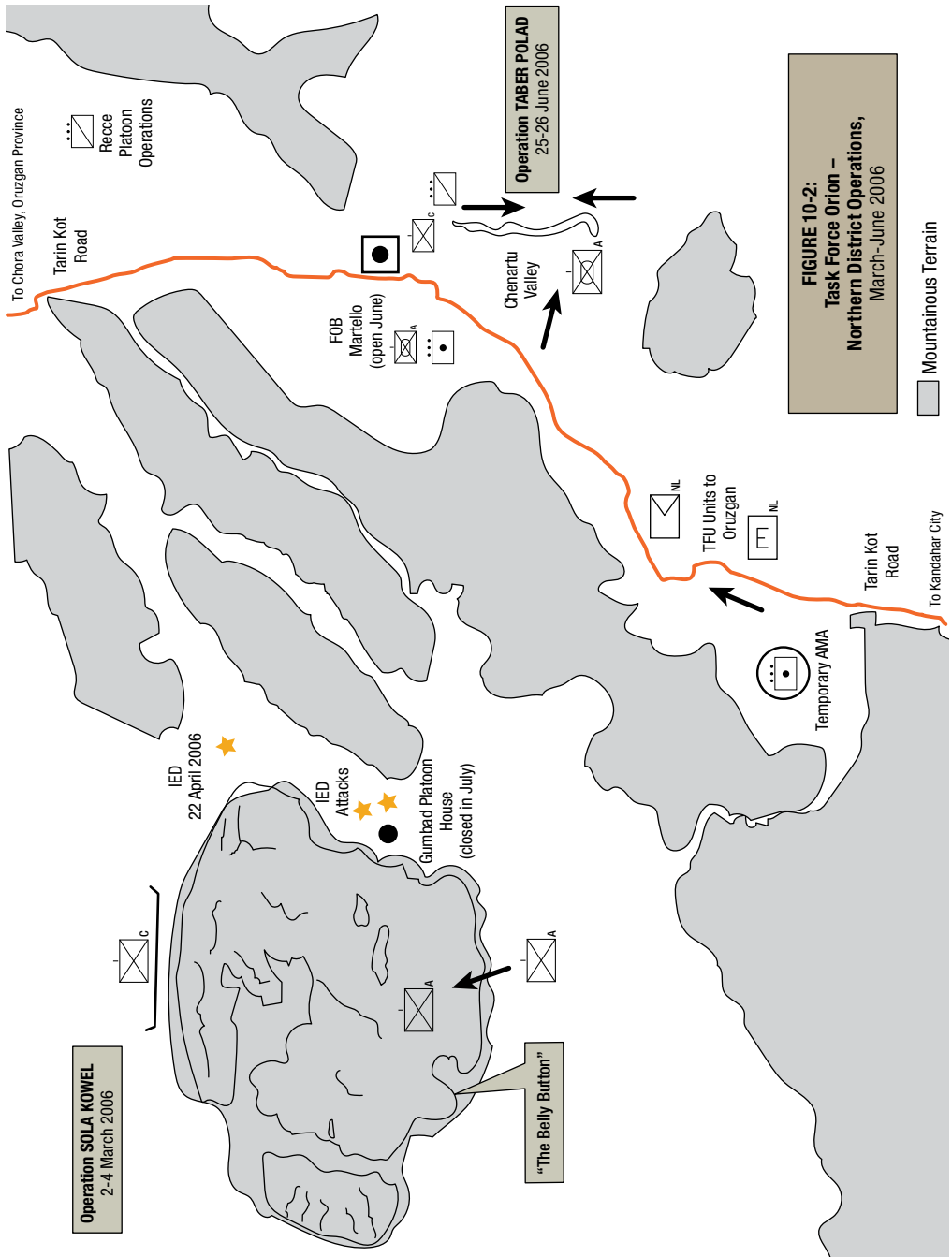


FIGURE 10-2:
Task Force Orion –
Northern District Operations,
March–June 2006

Mountainous Terrain

Figure 10-2: Task Force Orion – Northern District Operations, March-June 2006

The Tarinkot road project was important from a number of standpoints. First, it would become a major trade route with positive spinoff benefits for Oruzgan farmers; it would permit agricultural products in Oruzgan to flow to markets in Kandahar City. Second, connecting the mountainous Oruzgan province with Kandahar would reduce that province's isolation, a state of affairs that the Taliban exploited for their purposes – in effect, northern Helmand province, Oruzgan province and northwestern Zabol province were believed to hold what CJTF-76 called “sanctuary areas.” Third, the incoming Dutch task force had to be able to safely deploy to Tarinkot, establish their base and replace the American PRT. The only real way to do that was to drive there from KAF.

Eventually TF Orion established FOB Martello just east of the Tarinkot road in upper Shah Wali Kot district and deployed Maj Gallinger's A Company to it. FOB Martello served as a waypoint for the Dutch convoys as well as a power projection base in the northern districts. With additional forces operating from the Gumbad Platoon House to the west, the idea was to keep the Taliban off balance while the provincial government consolidated in the district, and commercial and military road traffic flowed north and south. The PRT, with Michael Callan's Confidence in Government initiative pilot project, was supposed to play a major role here.

TF Orion's first contacts were in this district. Recce Platoon and a Coyote detachment had a brief contact on 4 February 2006 near Mianishin. This was a big surprise to the Taliban, who had never seen vehicles of this type so far into the mountains. Gumbad Platoon House was also attacked in mid-February. TF Orion responded with heavy weapons and M-777 artillery fire.²⁵



Photo Credit: Author

The inhospitable Shah Wali Kot district, depicted here during Task Force Orion operations in summer 2006, consisted of rocky mountainous terrain. It was classic guerrilla warfare territory but was relatively isolated from main population centres in the province.

Before Martello could be constructed, however, the enemy had to be disrupted with a deliberate operation. A and C Companies from TF Orion mounted Operation SOLA KOWEL into the Belly Button on 18–20 March. Scaling the rocky hills at night, A Company swept through the feature hoping to drive the enemy into the arms of C Company. Unfortunately, the enemy had departed the area.²⁶

After SOLA KOWEL, the insurgents in the district changed their operating methods and resorted to increased IED use, particularly in and around the Gumbad area. Two attacks in spring were followed by a massively lethal attack on 22 April 2006. BGen David Fraser's close protection party was attacked with a remotely detonated mine stack, killing Cpl Matthew Dinning, Bombardier Myles Mansell, Cpl Randy Payne and Lt Bill Turner. In a separate incident CIMIC officer Capt Trevor Greene was subjected to a vicious axe attack as he parlayed with local leaders in the district. He survived, but it was evident that the insurgents saw CIMIC projects as a threat to their objectives and sought to disrupt them. At the same time, the Taliban mounted a "night letter" intimidation campaign against the mullahs in the district. As TF Orion had little or no PSYOPS capability, and CTF Aegis was still sorting itself out in this area, it was not possible to mount a coherent information operations campaign to counter the Taliban's campaign at this time.

A variety of sweeps, and cordon and search operations throughout the district conducted by A and C Companies during March, April and May 2006 were successful in disrupting insurgent operations. Though there was little contact, at no time during this period were the insurgents successfully able to interdict the Tarinkot road in Shah Wali Kot. Indeed, conditions were deemed acceptable to open the Shah Wali Kot district centre.²⁷ The enemy did, however, pose a significant challenge to attempts to expand governance elsewhere in the northern parts of the district. As spring and summer progressed, the Dutch task force was able to deploy virtually unmolested to its new home in Oruzgan but the Taliban threat in Shah Wali Kot remained. These operations were not without casualties, however. In March 2006, a vehicle accident killed MCpl Tim Wilson and Cpl Paul Davis.

Operation KATERA: Helmand Province, March 2006

Early on in the tour, TF Orion and the NSE were confronted with the first of their unplanned out-of-area tasks. As we have seen, CTF Aegis' plan was to have the battle group work with the Afghan National Army and the PRT in Kandahar province in order to develop synergy between governance, security, and reconstruction. Operation KATERA and subsequent operations of a similar nature in Helmand province essentially invalidated that CTF Aegis plan by spring and summer 2006.



Photo Credit: Author

The Chenartu Valley in Shah Wali Kot district was the scene of a major Task Force Orion operation in June 2006. Here Captain Jon Hamilton's Recce Platoon races in its RG-31 vehicles to raid a compound believed to contain insurgent communications equipment.

Canadian involvement in Helmand province was controversial because of the central role that poppy cultivation played in Helmand (both in the economy and the local religious/political culture) and how it connected to the global narcotics trade. The main issue for Canada revolved around counter-narcotics policy. Simply put, there were two views on the matter. One view was that poppy cultivation and processing undermined attempts to establish centralized government authority at all levels from Helmand to Kabul; it was a threat to domestic tranquility in European countries, and therefore poppy eradication should be a central tenet of coalition security operations. The alternative view was that poppy eradication and active suppression of the lowest end of the narcotics trade in Afghanistan would push the population in affected areas into the hands of the insurgents who were more than willing to provide protection and support to those affected by coalition security operations. The British government, the American Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. State Department were in the first camp,²⁸ while the U.S. Department of Defense, the intelligence community and the Canadian government were in the second. The Afghan government in Kabul leaned toward the first, probably out of considerations related to international community and bi-lateral proclivities or pressure vis-à-vis reconstruction funding.²⁹

Canada did not want its forces used to combat 'narcos.' That was technically a policing problem. However, TF Orion initially worked for CTF Bayonet and then worked for a Canadian-led but coalition headquarters, CTF Aegis, which in turn worked for an American headquarters, CJTF-76. When the U.S. State Department-funded and poorly named 'Afghan Eradication Force' deployed into Helmand in spring 2006 to conduct poppy eradication

operations, CJTF-76 was instructed to provide fire support to the force *in extremis*. TF Bayonet tasked TF Orion to have a company on three hours' notice to move to go and aid the eradication force. LCol Hope declined this task and, through the NCE, he had Col Noonan intervene. However, in March 2006, a Canadian infantry platoon from TF Orion had just rotated into the divisional QRF job when the Afghan Eradication Force came under attack in Helmand province. It was now possible that Canada could be dragged into supporting eradication efforts.³⁰

To the average Afghan in Helmand, the Afghan Eradication Force was indistinguishable from a coalition-Afghan military unit. It had American ETT advisors for the Afghan National Army component, Afghan National Police of various types from northern provinces, UH-1N helicopters armed with Gatling guns, and it used U.S. Special Forces forward operating bases like FOB Wolf (later renamed FOB Robinson) near Sangin in Helmand province for resupply and support. All the average poppy farmer saw was a Western-dominated and -equipped force coming to strip him of his livelihood. He might also have seen coalition special operations forces poking around in preparation for the deployment of British forces from Mazar-e Sharif. He would have heard that the British were coming and would have been unable to make the fine distinction between them and the Afghan Eradication Force. As an Afghan National Army intelligence officer explained to CTF Aegis, "the counter-narcotics campaign has become a propaganda tool for the Taliban. They encourage and provoke people to defend their lands [and] the government's inability to compensate farmers for the destruction of their crops has made the situation even worse."³¹ Organized, clan-based resistance to the Afghan government in Helmand was inevitable under these circumstances. Taliban support was a certainty. Clearly, nothing had been learned from the Wardak province experience with the Central Poppy Eradication Program back in 2004.

FOB Robinson came under attack on 29 March 2006 after the Afghan Eradication Force started to plow up poppy fields in the Sangin Valley. An Afghan National Army kandak with French and American ETTs operating near Sangin in operations unrelated to eradication operations came under attack on Highway 611. This unit was cut to pieces in a complex ambush and two French soldiers were killed and mutilated. The remnants made it to FOB Robinson, when they came under coordinated attack.

This situation highlighted the pitfalls of uncoordinated operations. The Special Forces reported to CJSOTF-A in Bagram; the ETTs reported to TF Phoenix in Kabul; the Afghan Eradication Forces reported to authorities in Kabul; and the Afghan kandak had an unclear chain of command. None had any relationship to CTF Aegis or its operations. The Canadian-led headquarters, however, had some situational awareness and heard garbled reports from the French ETTs. BGen Fraser decided to deploy the Aegis reserve to stabilize the situation at FOB Robinson and a Canadian infantry platoon deployed by Chinook helicopter to Sangin.

On arrival, however, the confused command and control situation generated a situation whereby Pte Robert Costall was accidentally shot and killed by U.S. Special Forces defenders of the facility. The attack against FOB Robinson, however, was rebuffed and during the firefight 60 attackers were killed. It was not clear exactly who conducted the attack but there was a strong belief in many quarters that it was the Taliban working with local clans protecting their power base and economic interests.³² (See Figure 10-3)

This second incident involving the death of a Canadian soldier to American friendly fire presented an extremely sensitive situation on a number of levels that could have had serious political ramifications for domestic support for the mission. At the same time, CTF Aegis was in danger of being drawn into alignment with poppy eradication efforts, something that BGen Fraser wanted to completely avoid. There was American pressure channeled through Maj Gen Freakley to get in and assist, no matter what the circumstances or future consequences.³³

The assault prompted CTF Aegis to agree to the temporary deployment of Maj Bill Fletcher's C Company, plus Coyote surveillance vehicles and M-777 guns to FOB Robinson. The battle group tactical headquarters also deployed. Sperwer TUAV surveillance operations were also mounted in support of this operation, with the mobile forward link system deployed so that TUAV could be controlled all the way from KAF. This deployment took place just in time as ambushes started in earnest along Route 611, the main road from Highway 1 up to FOB Robinson in Sangin. For the next month, C Company and its supporting forces worked with a U.S. Special Forces ODA and its associated Afghans identifying and disrupting the emergent insurgent organizations in and around Sangin. These involved intelligence-cued cordon and searches, local engagement with the population, anti-ambush and sweep operations designed to nab leadership targets. On 28 April 2006, C Company took out an eight-man Taliban ambush team at 1 500 metres using night sights and a 25mm cannon.³⁴

Like the FOB Martello/Gumbad Platoon House operations, Operation KATERA played a role in keeping the insurgents or potential insurgents on their heels while the British force deployed into Helmand province. Unfortunately, a line had already been crossed. The population could not distinguish between counter-narcotics operations, security operations against Taliban insurgents, or efforts to extend Afghan governance and development to remote areas in the province. A province that saw comparatively little violence since 2003 was about to explode with long-term repercussions not only for TF Orion but also for the whole coalition over the next five years.³⁵ In time, the war in Helmand would compete with the war in Kandahar for scarce coalition resources and in particular Canadian resources.

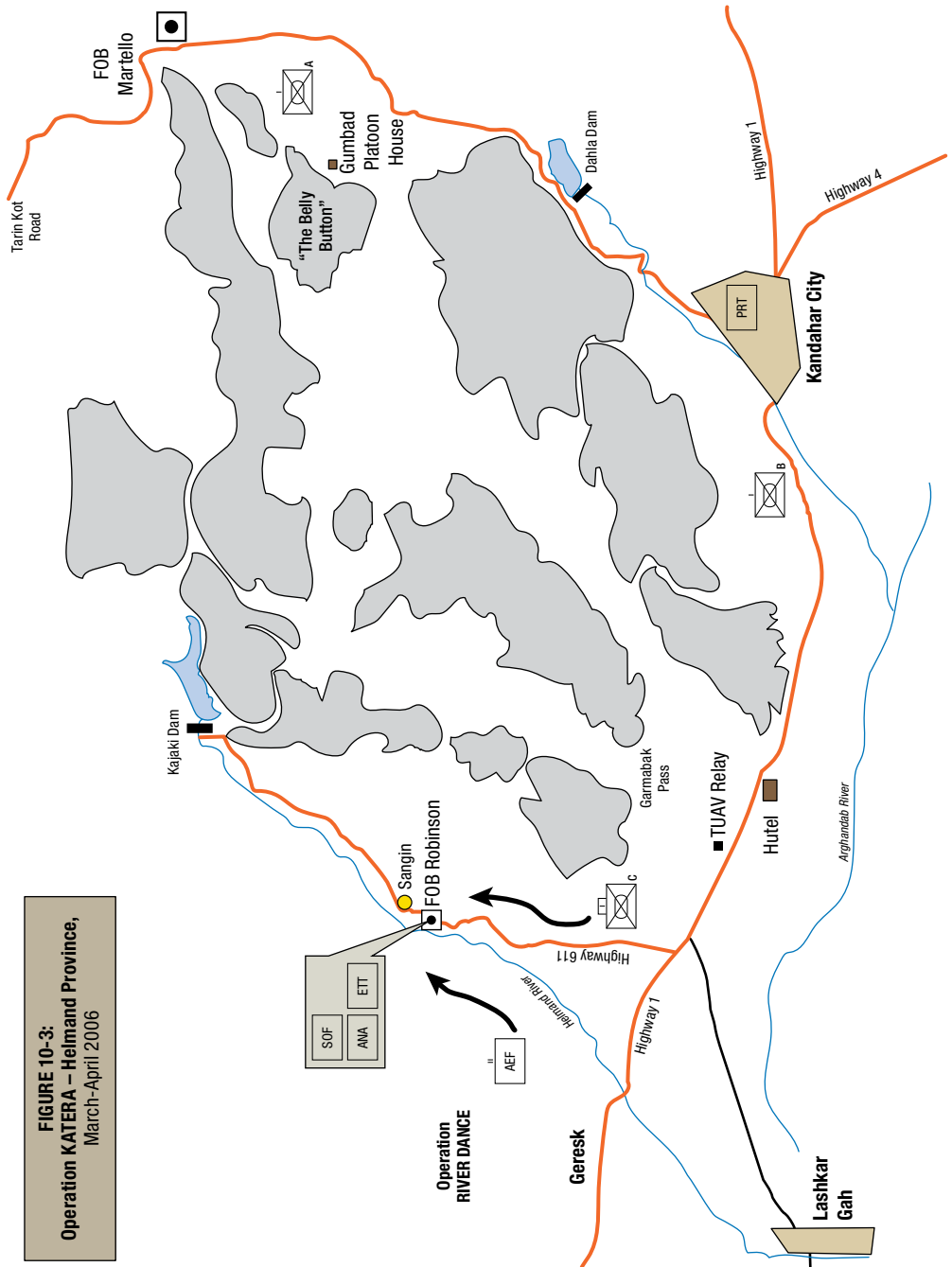


FIGURE 10-3:
Operation KATERA – Helmand Province,
 March-April 2006

Figure 10-3: Operation KATERA – Helmand Province, March-April 2006

CTF Aegis continued to observe developments in Helmand but what analysts uncovered was unsettling. Two primary ‘narco’ organizations cooperated with each other: the Ghazni Group and the Helmand Group. The Ghazni Group was believed to include Arif Noorzai and Kandahar Governor Asadullah Khalid. The Helmand Group was believed to consist of Sher Mohammad Akhund (former Helmand Governor), Mohammed Issa Noorzai, Bashir Noorzai and Oruzgan governor Jan Mohammad Khan. Akhund and the Noorzais were believed to have commercial links to the Taliban and possibly Al Qaeda. Bashir Noorzai was linked to practically everyone before his 2005 arrest in New York; he was a former HiG organizer, and he was connected to ISI as well as Governor Gul Agha Sherzai, and Taliban leaders Mullah Omar and Mullah Baradar of the Quetta Shura. The ‘connective tissue’ between the two groups was Ahmad Wali Karzai, who was married to Arif Noorzai’s sister.³⁶

This level of complexity and how it interacted with what CTF Aegis was attempting to implement in southern Afghanistan appeared to be overwhelming at the time. If the ‘narcos’ were part of the government, and the government was under attack by the ‘narcos’ and the insurgency, what could be done? Was it possible to focus solely on the insurgent cells themselves and conduct development activities in isolation of this problem? That was a possibility. The Taliban, HiG and Al Qaeda cells presented a measurable and definable security threat, while low-level and provincial-level development appeared to have little to do with the narco-complex and its interests.

Fraser and CTF Aegis understood the limitations as to what they could accomplish in this area and as a result maintained a watch on it as much as they could while attempting to determine what the longer-term ramifications were. Indeed, Fraser used Asadullah Khalid’s narco involvement against him as leverage when he needed to do so to move the goal posts forward in the security and development arenas. In addition, with the acceleration of enemy action in Regional Command (South) in June and July 2006, the priority was defeating the insurgency, not worrying about long-term issues. When Operation MEDUSA ramped up in the late summer, it all became moot as the survival of the coalition effort in the whole southern region was at stake. Fraser understood the problems of narco interaction with the government in the south, but there was no alternative to dealing with them in order to protect the civilian population and the development effort. Fraser referred to this as “The Devil That You Know” policy.³⁷

Camp Nathan Smith: Problems at the Provincial Reconstruction Team

The assassination of Glyn Berry in January 2006 generated a series of short- and long-term negative effects on the PRT. The first was the Board of Inquiry into the assassination itself. By this time, TF Orion had adopted a night movement protocol to, from and in Kandahar City in order to minimize the risk of IED attacks. The Board of

Inquiry wanted to visit the site where the Berry convoy had been attacked and wanted to do it in daylight. In what PRT officers deemed an “extremely reckless” move, the Board nonetheless deployed by convoy to the Highway 4 ‘IED Alley’ strike site. The Board’s convoy was predictably struck with a suicide vehicle-borne IED. Captain Bryan Flemming and his 12 RBC reconnaissance troop rescued the Board, their disabled LAV III and four wounded Canadian soldiers, one with life-threatening injuries. The loss of the vehicle and personnel reduced the PRT sortie rate.³⁸

As for the long-term effects, DFAIT and CIDA pulled their personnel out after Berry’s death, and refused to return unless stringent close protection and other security measures were implemented by the Canadian Forces and DND: this took months to sort out. During that time, little or nothing was done to maintain continuity on the important governance projects initiated in late 2005. The RCMP CIVPOL officers remained in Kandahar and maintained contact with the Afghan police. The DFID representative was in the process of transitioning out as the British took over in Helmand and the Dutch in Oruzgan province. The USAID representative, frustrated with the imposed inactivity, aligned herself with the American SOF community and supported their activities.³⁹

One of the most significant changes was the loss of American Commanders Emergency Response Program money. Those funds belonged to CTF Bayonet. When CTF Aegis took over, those funds dried up overnight, and shut down several higher-level development and reconstruction programmes. This left a handful of American Civil Affairs teams and their CERP money and then they departed in May. CTF Aegis was a Canadian-led headquarters working for an American division. There were no administrative provisions for it to access and deploy CERP monies.⁴⁰

To compound the situation, the decision made by Ottawa planners to merge the PRT and the TF Orion battle group proved to be less than constructive. The PRT commander, LCol Tom Doucette, reported to the battle group commander, LCol Hope. The PRT had to compete for resources, particularly in the “enabler” department – the integral EOD, public affairs, intelligence staff and support capacities were now subsumed by the battle group stationed at Kandahar Air Field, which the PRT commander did not control. This introduced yet another layer of friction into the system as the PRT commander had to ask an organization at KAF if he could use those resources, and they might be prioritized elsewhere.⁴¹

More importantly, the two platoons from B Company designated to provide force protection for the PRT’s reconstruction operations were increasingly pulled away for security operations conducted by the battle group, which meant that there was only a sporadically available “delivery system” for OGDs to get out and about – even if they wanted to. The Provincial Development Committee was moribund; the National Solidarity Programme could not be implemented. Then the PRT commander had to be repatriated early, leaving

Maj Erik Liebert in command. In short, the PRT was a mess which Maj Liebert had to sort out. PRT development and reconstruction initiatives were in trouble on almost all fronts and Canada was steadily losing credibility with the Afghan population at all levels throughout spring 2006. Promises had been made and there was little or no delivery.

This loss of credibility with the population was connected to the PRT's inability to have an effect on mentoring governance at the provincial level. It was recognized by Canadians that, as in Kabul, elements in the Kandahar power structure were involved in illicit and unsavory activities. A decision was made to work with these elements. There were two reasons for this. First, those individuals were assigned to the province by the democratically elected Karzai government, and second, there was a belief that in time these elements could eventually be steered toward more productive activity later. Once again, the lessons of Kabul were not necessarily applicable to Kandahar, and of note, the Canadian personalities that coalesced in Kabul and were able to make headway there had no equivalent counterparts in Kandahar. The Afghan population did not necessarily trust the provincial power structure and Canada was seen to be supporting it.⁴²

A significant additional problem involved domestic Canadian politics. Criticism by the media, the opposition and others pushed the government to demonstrate progress on development. The unwillingness to publicly explain that the deteriorating security situation was affecting development, coupled with the government's inability to convince CIDA and DFAIT to get back to work in Kandahar, generated pressure on those left at the PRT to 'be seen' to be 'doing development' as a counter to the critic's perception that there was 'too much kinetic activity' – regardless of the realities of the situation. Though this was never explicitly stated, this pressure was felt by those in the forward operating environment.⁴³

TF Orion had plans to mitigate some of these problems. LCol Hope wanted to move the other government departments' representatives from the PRT to the Governor's Palace and work closely with the Provincial Coordination Centre and Governor Asadullah Khalid in a more direct fashion. In that way, the PRT might transition to be more like a SAT-A organization and have a better chance at mentoring change in Kandahar. Two things derailed this plan. First, LCol Doucette's TAC convoy accidentally killed a civilian taxi driver. The subsequent chain of events resulted in LCol Doucette's re-deployment to Canada and further disruption to PRT activities. Second, CEFCOM planners consulted the follow-on task force, TF 3-06, about what they wanted to do about the PRT, the Joint Coordination Centre and governance mentoring. Their reply was that they wanted to retain the existing structure. No changes were made and a new PRT commander was sought in Canada.⁴⁴

Maj Liebert and the remaining PRT staff stepped into the breach to impose some order on the chaos. It was like an "Apollo 13" situation: practically every 'system' had 'crashed.'

What could reasonably be accomplished with the resources at hand? Unlike the previous PRT, the Orion PRT had a beefed-up CIMIC component. There was Quick Impact Project money, and there was still a Commanders Contingency Fund. The CIVPOL officers were still ready, willing, and able to continue with police assessment and mentoring tasks. There were non-governmental organizations operating independently in Kandahar that had resources. Then Canadian money was suddenly thrown at the PRT so they could spend it and be seen to be 'doing development.' The issue that emerged was this: how much damage would short-term instant gratification reconstruction cause to long-term mentoring and development? That question was never seriously addressed in 2006.

Maj Liebert and his staff sought out 'synergies,' places and situations where the resources they had available to them could be employed to improve more than one line of operation. The staff agreed that there were four lines of operations: security, health, education and support to tactical operations. An example of one such 'synergy' was a plan to support girls' education and then use the schools as a distribution point for cooking oil. Another example (among many) was the PRT's attempts to rationalize health care in Kandahar City and work with the emergent Ministry of Health; there were several hospitals and clinics, one of which belonged to the Afghan National Army and another to the police. The PRT worked to get 'cross pollination' between the staffs of these institutions with the intended effects of improving health care delivery to the population across the board, but also to improve health care to the security forces so that they would become more effective. There was no reason, for example, why an Afghan police medic could not improve his skills alongside a civilian doctor.⁴⁵

Blocks to this came, surprisingly, from the Red Cross/Red Crescent who insisted that they were neutral and resisted having anything to do with the PRT. That situation was an example of a larger problem. Non-governmental organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross were in fact undermining the Afghans' ability to govern; they provided health care to wounded insurgents in what was a government hospital. That sort of problem replicated itself in other areas and posed severe challenges to reconstruction and development efforts. First, there was no incentive for the emergent Afghan government to take over basic services if non-governmental organizations were doing it for them and second, it made a non-governmental organization appear to be more legitimate than the government to the population.⁴⁶

Supporting tactical operations with CIMIC was increasingly important as the battle group's operational tempo dramatically increased in spring. This situation posed yet another question. Where did CIMIC stop and development start? Without the development experts *in situ* at the PRT, CIMIC was left to its own devices to traverse that grey area, especially when CIMIC became the temporary delivery system for development funds.

In time, there was almost no distinction between tactical CIMIC and development, which posed challenges and longer-term problems between the military and civilian entities at the PRT as the years rolled on.

To confuse matters further, CTF Aegis became increasingly involved in trying to coordinate PRT operations and development across its area of responsibility in southern Afghanistan. As the Dutch and British PRTs stood up in Oruzgan and Helmand, more and more thought was given to linkages at the formation level. All in all, there were far too many inputs trying to influence what was going on at the Kandahar PRT provided by entities that did not appreciate the ground-level problems that were being encountered by the coalition – and that did not even take into consideration the lethal impact of insurgent activity.

LCol Hope, Maj Liebert and the PRT staff did what they could with what they had. They identified, early on, critical things that needed to be done to stabilize the situation for reconstruction. For example, they identified the dangers of having an independent prison system that was disconnected to the (virtually non-existent) legal system. They noted, in particular, problems with Sarposha Prison. The lack of impact by the German-led policing ‘pillar’ in Kabul was highlighted time and again, as the Canadian CIVPOL moved around and mentored the various police forces in and around the city. The procedural difficulties encountered in trying to use CIDA money for police support projects, however, prevented the PRT from implementing effective programmes that would have improved the policing situation in 2006.

One of the most important issues identified by the PRT at that time was the religious situation in Kandahar City and in the south. Padre Suleyman Demiray, the Canadian Forces’ Imam, joined the PRT early in 2006. After meeting with religious leaders, he developed significant insight into the role of the mullahs and the Kandahar Ulema Shura in Afghan political life. Indeed, religion and politics are not separate in Afghanistan as they are in Canada. The Kandahar Ulema Shura, it turned out, was a battleground unto itself. The Taliban were doing everything they could to eliminate moderate members of this body and advance the careers of those who supported the extremist view of Islam. The Kandahar Ulema Shura, as a respected pre-eminent religious body in the south, had the potential to influence the rural mullahs and the National Ulema Shura in Kabul. Unfortunately, potentially valuable connections to the Kandahar Ulema Shura were unable to mature in 2006 as it had an antagonistic relationship with the Governor, which compounded the provision of security and of a financial livelihood to its members. At the same time, the strong potential for religious engagement was lost in the flurry of high-tempo operations that summer. This would also have detrimental long-term effects on Canadian operations over the course of the next few years.⁴⁷

On the positive side, the PRT was able to secure the services of Michael Callan from CIDA by summer 2006. The emergent Confidence in Government project, dormant since January, was re-activated, initiated in Shah Wali Kot district, and eventually became a catalyst for NSP mechanisms in the province by 2007. That development thread will be taken up in a subsequent chapter.

An important PRT function that was shrouded in secrecy at the time was its significant role in counter-terrorism operations inside Kandahar City. Camp Nathan Smith served as a forward operating base for SOF operations directed against the urban terrorist cells that were operating in the nearby Loy Wala neighbourhood; it had a helipad, translation capabilities, and medical facilities that were drawn on from time to time. SIGINT facilities were also discreetly installed so that enemy communications could be “DF’d” (direction finding operations) and monitored, and counter-intelligence operatives collected HUMINT from sources in a comparatively safe environment. The Afghan Ministry of the Interior and other ANSF representatives at Camp Nathan Smith provided a significant flow of information as well to those who needed it.

The Afghan National Security Forces in 2006

The state of ANSF development in southern Afghanistan was poor. The Afghan National Army, in theory, was supposed to have a brigade for each province. Each was supposed to consist of three infantry kandaks (battalions), a combat support kandak and a combat service support kandak. Additionally, a corps headquarters, 205 (Hero) Corps, commanding all of it, was to be established in Kandahar. The reality was that there was a three-kandak brigade in Zabul, a kandak in Kandahar, and two kandaks in Helmand. None of these units were really capable of operating above platoon level. All were mentored by American ETTs and French SOF – and even those teams were thin in on the ground. One ETT even consisted of U.S. Navy submariners.⁴⁸ As we have seen, the CTF Aegis campaign plan saw the twinning of a kandak with each national battle group in each province. That was the ideal, in a plan established under less arduous conditions.

On numerous occasions, Canadian commanders from Ottawa visited Kabul and met with Abdul Rahim Wardak, the Minister of Defence. Word would come down that more ANA troops were coming, but then none arrived. There was competition between the CJSOTF and the conventional forces for Afghan National Army kandaks in southern Afghanistan. In some cases, kandaks were hived off to Oruzgan to work with American SOTFs there or in Zabul. CANSOF took over partnership with a kandak in April 2006. CTF Aegis was, however, not situationally aware enough early on in 2006 to bureaucratically compete with CJSOTF for these resources. At the same time, the Ministry of Defence in Kabul kept numerous kandaks in and around Kabul ‘on tap’ in case of a coup attempt.

The only Canadian success in this area prior to August was when BGen Fraser used his personal linkages with the 1/205 Corp G3, Maj (later BGen) Habibbi, who was able to get an Afghan National Army infantry company to partner with TF Orion in June–July 2006.⁴⁹

As for the police, the situation was nothing short of catastrophic, particularly in Kandahar province. There were police, and then there were “police.” As the PRT CIVPOL reported in late 2005, the “police” were little more than re-uniformed militias that had been disarmed under the DIAG programme. There were Afghan Highway Police, Afghan Border Police, Afghan National Police, and so on, but the Border Police really were Col Abdul Raziq’s Spin Boldak militia “police” wearing Border Police uniforms, for example. Regular police had little or no training, though the CIVPOL at the PRT was working to improve that incrementally. For the elections in 2005, the Ministry of the Interior deployed Standby Police Unit 005, a sort of nationally-controlled gendarmerie. It progressively succumbed to Kandahar provincial power broker machinations throughout 2006.⁵⁰

In a general sense, the police units reported to a chain of command that looked nice on a PowerPoint presentation. That chain of command went from the district, to province, to region, to Kabul. The reality was that the “police” coexisted with and overwhelmed this police structure: the “police” reported to provincial power brokers. In some cases, these were all the same people: a district power broker might be a member of parliament but also informally in charge of the police in his district, with a designated district ‘chief of police’ supposedly running things and interacting with the chain of command. Though this appeared contradictory to Canadians, it was the actual state of affairs and it had to be accommodated by the coalition units on the ground. In effect, the police in a given district would cooperate with coalition forces if, and it was a big if, the interests of their patrons coincided with those of the coalition forces.⁵¹

It is critical to understand the damaging effects of “police” operations. These organizations, wearing Afghan police uniforms, shook down citizens passing through their territory; indulged in selective poppy eradication; and the insurgents even bribed them to support their activities. If their patrons were associated with the provincial government, “police” actions generated grievances among the population, which the Taliban then exploited to shift the population away from the government. Another important problem was that non-governmental organizations and the UN hired police as guards for their facilities and escorts for their personnel, and they paid better than the government. This reduced the number of effective police (and available weapons) to an even greater extent.⁵²

In 2006, there were simply not enough coalition resources to help shift the “police” to become police. The Germans, who were in charge of the policing pillar in Kabul, were rarely if ever seen in Kandahar province, let alone Helmand or Oruzgan. Note that this was five years after the Bonn Agreement. To take up the slack, the Americans created an ad

hoc police mentoring organization, but it was limited in numbers; it was only just getting underway in mid-2006 and had not yet had an impact in southern Afghanistan. CTF Aegis played a positive role in informally and later formally coordinating police development as much as possible across Regional Command (South) but the pressures of fighting the ramped-up insurgency quickly took priority by mid-2006.⁵³

The effects of not having enough Afghan police and army personnel in the southern provinces meant that CTF Aegis forces were the only real option when it came to security operations. The effect on TF Orion was that the task force had to be mobile and prepared to either respond or pre-empt insurgent action anywhere in Kandahar province. There was no troop or police density at all. This made reconstruction, development and governance highly problematic and dependent on the insurgents' troop density. The insurgency could not be everywhere at once either, so this set up the operational situation in the province into a series of act-react-act moves between the adversaries, much like a chess game.

Spin Boldak and the United Arab Emirates Initiative

The critical entry point for southern Afghanistan and the regional route from Quetta to Kandahar sat in a sort of twilight zone in 2006. Canadian CIMIC teams from the PRT and human intelligence operators started working in Spin Boldak in late 2005 through PRT auspices. With the restrictions on PRT operations after the Berry assassination, this connectivity dropped away, as did visibility on various nefarious activities. For the most part, French SOF continued to operate there from their forward operating base throughout early to mid-2006. Col Abdul Raziq appeared to have the situation under control through a variety of means, savory and unsavory.

In March-April 2006, CDS General Rick Hillier held meetings with his counterpart from the UAE on the possibility of having the UAE become involved with ISAF efforts in Afghanistan. The UAE was looking to join in the Kabul area, already had special operations forces elements at Bagram Air Field, and had a lot of reconstruction money to spend. An interagency team, with NCE commander Col Putt as the Canadian Forces representative, explored possibilities. Was it possible to get the UAE to join in PRT operations? And if so, what high-cost, high profile projects might they get involved in? Putt and the team canvassed Asadullah Khalid, whose eyes lit up.⁵⁴ A priority list was compiled: mosques, schools, hospitals and roads.⁵⁵

Why the UAE? The Emirates contributed to the NATO-led Kosovo Force, both militarily and in terms of reconstruction monies. UAE AH-64 attack helicopters patrolled the skies while UAE Leclerc main battle tanks acted as a deterrent to Serb armour alongside Canadian, British and German armour. Second, the obviously positive benefits of co-religiosity were attractive, as well as the trade and labour connections that already existed. UAE royalty

frequently came to hunt in southern Afghanistan. And there was increasing pressure by the British to have any planned UAE contingent deploy to Helmand province. Strategically for Canada, the UAE hosted Canadian Forces at Minhad and the fleet support activity in Dubai.⁵⁶

The idea evolved so that the Emirates would contribute to the PRT with not only monetary reconstruction resources but also that a mechanized infantry battalion plus a special forces group could take over activities in Spin Boldak as part of ISAF. The initial enthusiasm that built up on the Canadian side dropped off by late summer 2006 as the legal aspects of a memorandum of understanding between the UAE and the government of Afghanistan mired things down.⁵⁷

Then the French SOF abruptly left Spin Boldak in July 2006, with little or no warning. TF Orion had to man the abandoned and now vandalized forward operating base. LCol Hope sent a platoon from C Company to secure the facility, with the intention of deploying the remaining company soon after. However, events in Zharey district and Helmand province ensured that even this activity was delayed. Spin B remained, as it had for years, in the hands of Col Raziq.

B Company Operations: Zharey and Panjwayi Districts

B Company, led by Maj Grimshaw, was the PRT's force protection company and acted as a QRF within Kandahar City but, as spring progressed, the company became more and more focused on operations to the west of the city. In essence, because B Company was connected to the PRT, it had access to a greater variety of information on what was going on in various districts. Some of this information conflicted with prevailing views in higher headquarters as to the nature and extent of the insurgency in the province. In addition to PRT and non-governmental organizations sources, B Company had links to the Joint Provincial Coordination Centre. B Company also started to conduct patrols along Highway 1 west toward Helmand province in anticipation of the British task force deployment. To support those operations, B Company engaged in CIMIC and information collection operations and then established relations with the police in the area. Unlike Shah Wali Kot district, which was mountainous and the population dispersed in rugged terrain, B Company's area of operations was agricultural, densely populated and accessible by road, which facilitated contact with the Afghans.⁵⁸ (See Figure 10-4)

What B Company uncovered was a complex array of activity in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. Both were extremely diverse from a tribal point of view. (See Figure 10-5.) The Baqi Network, playing off of tribal discontent between the Panjpai tribes and the Popalzai and Barakzai-dominated provincial government, was still operational and supporting IED attacks in the city from the district. There was poppy cultivation, but there was also selective eradication aggravated by local police corruption. There were water rights disputes,

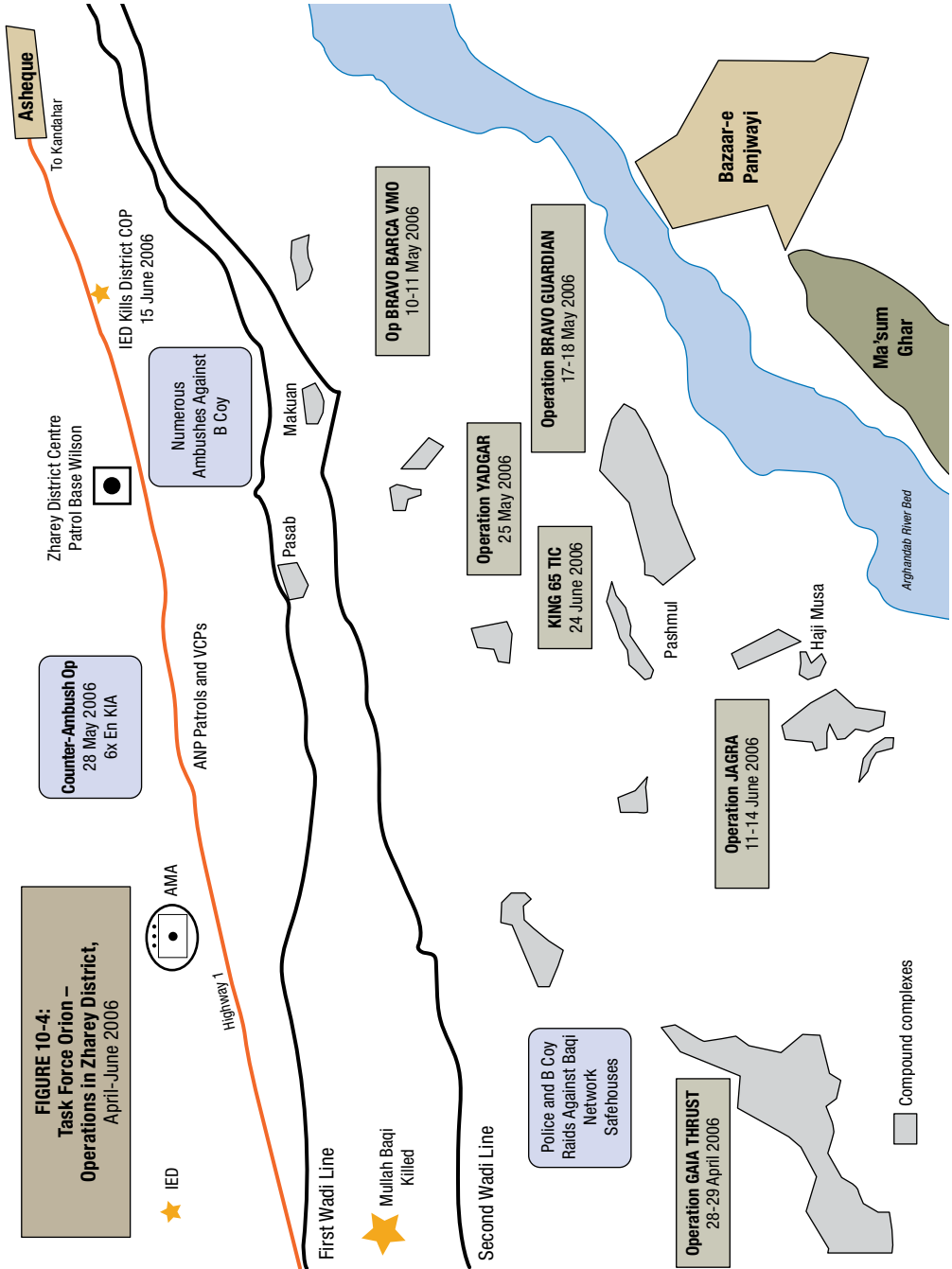
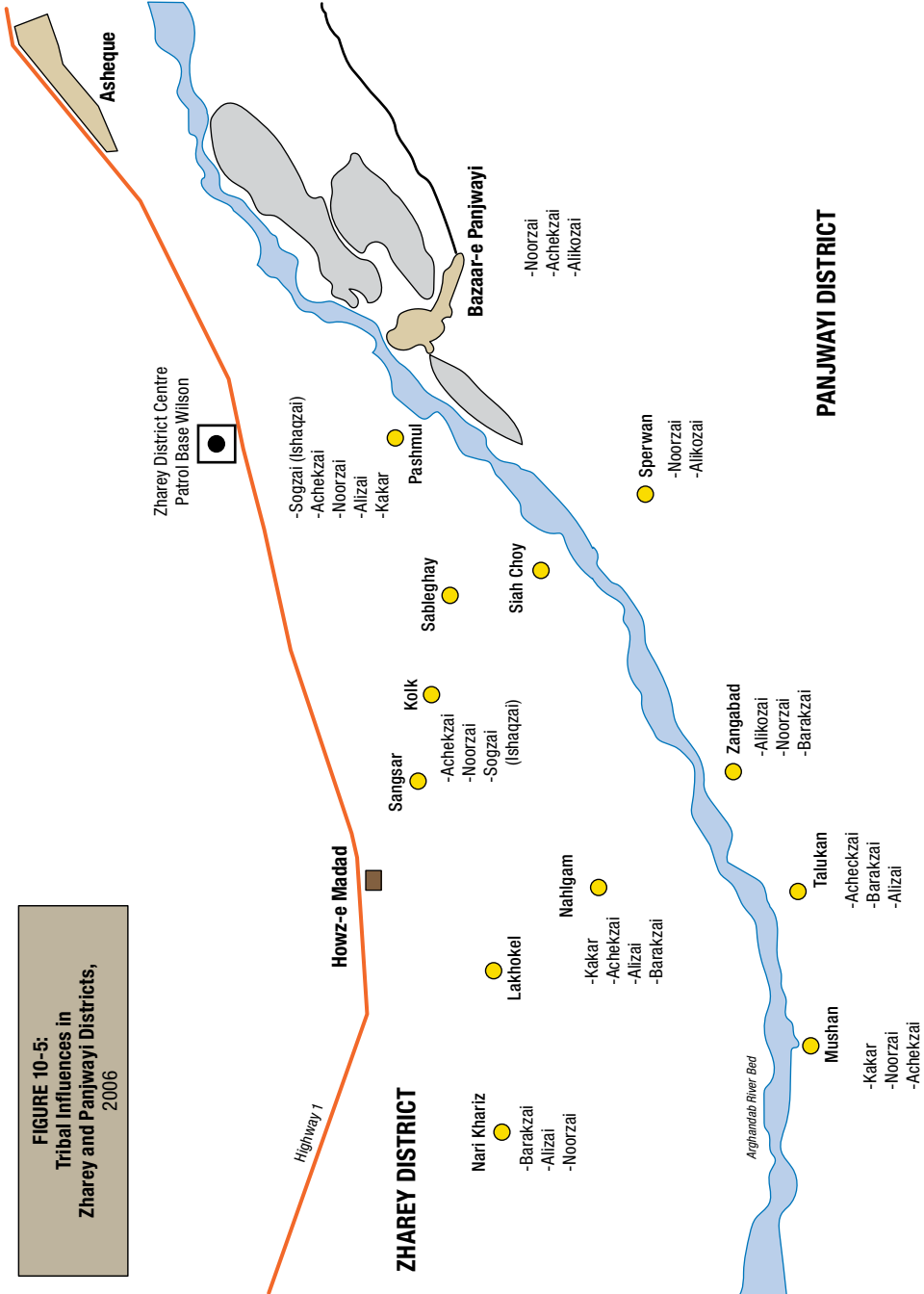


Figure 10-4: Task Force Orion – Operations in Zharey District, April–June 2006



Source: Captain Zia Massoud to Author

Figure 10-5: Tribal Influences in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, 2006

which had violent overtones as water was the basis of crop cultivation, which in turn was how the bulk of the population in Zharey district made its living. It was unclear initially what was Taliban violence and what was commercial or inter-community violence but, as time progressed, B Company saw more and more Taliban involvement in the district. What emerged over the course of several months was that there was a slow and virtually undetected enemy build-up in the Zharey and Panjwayi districts and the enemy were playing on grievances that the local population had with the present provincial power structure.⁵⁹

Eventually, TF Orion established FOB Wilson, later called Patrol Base Wilson, on Highway 1, and co-located it with the Zharey district centre. This base provided a presence in the area, facilitated patrolling along Highway 1, facilitated contact with the Afghan security forces along it and served as a launch pad for operations into the dense, built-up part of the district south of the highway.

The defining terrain types in Zharey and Panjwayi districts were the grape fields, grape drying huts and irrigation systems. The pictures of the next few pages depict the dense nature of the terrain with attendant difficulties of operating in them.



Photo Credit: Author

Seen from the air in summer 2006, the grape trenches are surrounded by walls and flush with growth. A water pumping hut is in the foreground, with three grape drying huts in the background. The huts are made of mud but over the years have developed the consistency of concrete.



Photo Credit: Author

This is a typical grape field in winter. The vines grow on mud walls, which are usually four feet high and, like the other structures in the area, are also the consistency of concrete.

B Company moved in and increased its operational tempo in the district. There were notable successes. Elements of the Afghan police led by the dynamic Qadr Jan working with B Company raided weapons caches and safe houses throughout the district. The infamous Baqi Network, including Mullah Baqi himself, was eventually hunted down and destroyed in an Afghan police operation in Sangsar on 14 April 2006. That led the Taliban leadership to send in high-profile commander Mullah Dadullah Lang in a bid to reconstitute the networks and boost the Taliban presence. That move provided TF Orion with yet another indicator that Zharey district was of increasing importance. Unfortunately, Qadr Jan was hit and killed by friendly fire from an American AH-64 helicopter during a tragic series of miscommunications in the course of these operations. Maj Grimshaw noted that “it was if somebody flicked a switch and the insurgency was on.”⁶⁰

TF Orion mounted a series of sweeps and raids into Zharey similar to the operations in Shah Wali Kot, not only to keep the insurgents off balance but also to gather information on them. Although the term “manoeuvre to collect” was not really in vogue yet, this was what these operations amounted to as TF Orion learned about its foe. Information developed from these operations led to data on the presence of senior Taliban commanders Hafiz Majid, Akhtar Mohammad and Khairullah moving into Maywand district in support of Mullah Dadullah Lang’s activities in Zharey district.⁶¹ During one of these sweeps,



Photo Credit: Author

The irrigation system connects each grape field with catchment areas that in turn connect to the Arghandab River. In summer, they are filled with water but are also covered in foliage and thus were used by insurgents for concealed movement. Note the height of the Canadian soldiers for comparison.

CHAPTER TEN



Photo Credit: Author

This Canadian patrol moves through a grape field in Panjwayi district. Note how congested the field is and the opportunities for concealment it affords a defender.

C Company came under sustained RPG and machine gun fire. With his 25mm cannon inoperable, Sgt Michael Denine climbed out of his LAV III, manned the pintle mounted machine gun and suppressed the enemy with a high volume of fire. He was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.

After a successful special operations forces strike over in Helmand killed several other enemy commanders, the Afghan National Directorate of Security reported that the Kandahar leadership and Lang were recalled by the Quetta Shura as a result of both the 14 May and 18 May operations to reorganize and alter existing plans. Their sub-commanders all retired to the mountains to the north for the time being.⁶² Mullah Dadullah Lang then conducted several interviews with the media and explained that large-scale operations instead of guerilla tactics would be used in the future.⁶³

Operation BRAVO GUARDIAN brought in Maj Bill Fletcher's C Company to work with B Company on the Zharey problem on 17-18 May. C Company moved into screening positions south of Highway 1 as B Company and Afghan police forces crossed the Arghandab River and moved north toward Pashmul. AH-64 Apaches engaged fleeing enemy fighters as a B Company platoon took rocket-propelled grenade fire from enemy forces in a compound, which produced casualties. Capt Nichola Goddard, a forward observation officer from 1 RCHA, prepared a fire mission from her LAV III but her vehicle was struck with multiple anti-tank rounds, killing her. A B-1B bomber dropped a 500-pound precision guided munition on the compound, destroying the enemy. The enemy survivors fled the battlefield. This level of violence had not been seen yet in Zharey district, even in fall 2005.⁶⁴

On 22 May 2006, Governor Asadullah Khalid met with BGen Fraser and expressed concern about Zharey and Panjwayi districts. Khalid warned that fighters were coming into Zharey and the enemy were building up their logistics organization. He also told Fraser he met with the other Kandahar power brokers: Mullah Naqib, Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri and Ahmad Wali Karzai, and they agreed that the enemy would mount attacks on the non-governmental aid organizations and the UN agencies in Kandahar. More protection was required, and Khalid agreed to work more closely with the Provincial Development Committee. Parenthetically, Canadian observers noted that this was one of the first attempts to increase Ahmad Wali Karzai's influence in provincial circles and Khalid supported it.⁶⁵

There was more fighting from 24 to 28 May 2006. An ambush on a B Company patrol, which resulted in the severe wounding of interpreter Niaz "Junior" Mohammed by an RPG round, evolved into a two-company assault supported with M-777 fire onto an enemy defensive position in a grape drying hut complex (Operation YADGAR). Covered with attack helicopters and close air support, the TF Orion force took 11 detainees, killed nine other enemy and wounded an unknown number of insurgents.⁶⁶ A B Company

G-Wagon caught fire during the ambush, blocking the road. MCpl Collin Fitzgerald entered the vehicle while under fire and unblocked the road for the rest of the column. He was awarded the Medal of Military Valour.

A subsequent operation conducted from 11 to 14 June, Operation JAGRA, essentially repeated the sweep but from different directions with C Company sweeping the enemy into B Company. There was some contact, with RPG's fired and joint direct attack munitions (JDAM) dropped in reply by a British Harrier aircraft. Unlike previous operations, the enemy were staying in place to fight: they were dying but they were starting to die in place. That was new and unusual. LCol Hope and the TF Orion staff took note. Over the course of weeks, SOF operations significantly increased in the district as more and more intelligence on enemy leadership targets entered the SOF system. Things had changed. Zharey district was hot, and it would get hotter.⁶⁷

Counter Rocket Operations

Kandahar Air Field remained the primary target for insurgent rocketeers. As 2006 progressed, the frequency of the attacks increased. CTF Aegis retained overall responsibility for KAF security, working in conjunction with the Joint Defence Operations Centre (JDOC). The KAF security 'bubble' consisted of a number of 'bands': the outermost band supposedly had Afghan National Police conducting their regular patrols. A Romanian infantry battalion handled security towers on the perimeter of the airfield while a variety of nations, including Canada, rotated the main gate search and security task. The more specialized base defence tasks progressively became the responsibility of the RAF Regiment by 2007. An RAF Regiment squadron brought mortars, snipers, radar, and command and control capacity to bear on the problem. A number of surveillance towers equipped with infrared and thermal imaging camera systems were erected to provide round-the-clock surveillance. The U.S. Air Force also deployed human intelligence teams as part of the effort. Prior to the arrival of the RAF Regiment, Canada provided a QRF on rotation with American, British and Dutch units. To complicate matters, this platoon, led by Capt Kevin Barry, 'belonged' to CJTF-76 in Bagram but was cut to the Joint Defence Operations Centre as required.⁶⁸

The rocket threat consisted of 107mm unguided rockets set up on makeshift launchers and connected to a battery and timer so they could be launched without the 'rocketeer' present. The rockets themselves were of Chinese and later Iranian manufacture. One type of 'launcher' was an "X" made of stakes, with the rocket placed on it and fired by a timer. In a later iteration, the rocket was fired from a tube that was buried in the ground and aligned with the base. These configurations were never used together, which indicated the presence of separate insurgent rocket teams.⁶⁹

Statistical analysis of the point of origin, the trajectory, and the point of impact was used to determine where rockets were fired from – these ‘rocket boxes’ generally were northwest and northeast of KAF; rockets were rarely fired from the south. How exactly the rockets were brought in to Afghanistan from Pakistan was not clear in 2006, but it was evident that the rocketeers were averse to the wide-open spaces of the south and preferred the more built-up and populated areas between Kandahar City and KAF.⁷⁰

An average rocket attack in 2006 consisted of the radar systems picking up the launch, followed by activation of the base siren, with subsequent scurrying by KAF occupants to concrete bunkers located throughout the base. There was no means of intercepting the rocket once it was launched. The QRF would respond to the point of origin and assess the launch site, interview local people and add to the intelligence picture. When the RAF Regiment deployed, there were more proactive measures taken like the deployment of sniper teams into the rocket boxes.⁷¹

It was easy to downplay the rocket threat, as they were unguided and inaccurate. That said, KAF was big and getting bigger. The probability of hitting something vital increased over time. A Harrier close support aircraft was destroyed and a dud rocket landed next to the control van for the MQ-1 Predator UAVs. And there were casualties. In July 2006, a Kellogg Brown & Root dining facility located next to the Canadian HQ was struck with a rocket, wounding 14 people, including a Canadian soldier from the Sperwer TUAV detachment. Another narrowly missed the Tim Hortons at the Boardwalk, which caused a temporary loss of morale until it was re-opened. The rocket attacks added some friction into the overall coalition system through the tying up of resources, loss of sleep and in some cases, psychological effects on some individuals. In an information operations sense, the rocket attacks added to the media’s perception that there was a state of siege in Kandahar.⁷²

The Insurgency Evolves and Combined Task Force Aegis Adapts, June-July 2006

The exact nature of the Taliban’s plans in May-June 2006 remains obscure. What was gleaned at the time through a variety of ISTAR means led the TF Orion leadership to conclude that the Taliban sought to mount a series of spectacular attacks inside Kandahar City, something TF Orion referred to as the “Tet Thesis” (named after the Tet Offensive of 1968). The target list included Sarposa Prison, the Governor’s Palace, the Governor’s Guest House, UNAMA HQ, and the PRT.⁷³ The overall purpose was to demonstrate to all audiences (domestic, regional and international) that the Afghan government was incapable of governing the province. In theory, this would establish the conditions for sympathetic

elements in the city and its surrounding districts to switch sides and throw out the coalition forces. Something similar had occurred in the mid-1990s with the Taliban and to a certain extent in 2001 with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. There was no consensus on this theory, however. CJTF-76, for example, expressed its skepticism throughout June 2006.⁷⁴

CTF Aegis's understanding of enemy operations initially relied on assessments made in 2005 by CTF Bayonet and other entities. The Taliban was considered a loose conglomeration of cells, with each cell having 30 or so operatives. The Quetta Shura in Pakistan was the main headquarters for the movement and issued orders directly to the cells. The methodology of the rural cells consisted of direct fire attacks against coalition forces whenever they came within proximity. IEDs were initially used to canalize movement during this time. Mullah Dadullah Lang emerged as the field commander for most of the Taliban cells inside Afghanistan's southern provinces later in 2005, which resulted in the addition of assassination operations and IED terrorism within Kandahar City in the run-up to the elections.⁷⁵

The enemy's augmentation of both the rural effort and the urban effort continued in early 2006 but the methodology was the same and the results remained unimpressive. Indeed, the actions by TF Orion in the northern and western districts of Kandahar were very similar to the TF Gun Devils operations in 2005 and the enemy remained disrupted in those areas.

The 22 May 2006 announcement by Mullah Dadullah Lang that the Taliban would change how it was operating and the subsequent ratification of this change by the Quetta Shura during a meeting held between 23 to 30 May confirmed that CTF Aegis and allied operations had had a significant effect on the enemy from February through April. Indeed, it appeared as though the Quetta Shura was going to weight its operations in Helmand province, where the British position was seen to be weaker than the Canadian position in Kandahar.⁷⁶

Between 3 and 5 June, the Taliban commanders were back in Afghanistan: Hafiz Majid and three of his sub-commanders were holed up somewhere near Talukan in Panjwayi district preparing to implement the new plans. At the same time, the National Directorate of Security picked up indications that HiG groups were on their way into Kandahar province, something deemed unusual by the analysts. Other information noted the movement of groups of Arab and Pakistani fighters from Karachi to Quetta and then into Kandahar City.⁷⁷ It was difficult to assess the enemy's intentions but by the end of June, there was better information indicating that Mullah Dadullah Lang and Mullah Baradar's explicit objective was now to capture southern Afghanistan and establish a permanent presence in Kandahar. The Quetta Shura concurred.⁷⁸

There was a belief in coalition circles that if they could keep the Taliban disrupted and frustrated long enough they might want to come to the table and talk. However, with this apparent shift from guerrilla operations to a complex mix of urban terrorism and aspirations towards more conventional operations, it now appeared that opportunities

might emerge to defeat the insurgency outright. Until that opportunity presented itself, however, disruption remained the basis for CTF Aegis operations.⁷⁹ This approach took many forms. The manoeuvre units continued in their district-level activities while CTF Aegis looked toward more esoteric means.

One example was the identification of the insurgency's medical system. This included the locations of senior medical personnel, casualty collection points, and medical evacuation 'ratlines' back down to the Durand Line and across it. Despite the overt emphasis on the efficacy of jihadi martyrdom, the Taliban took medical operations seriously. Before mounting operations, the insurgents would create and man casualty collection points and stockpile medical supplies. In many cases, particularly in Zabul and Helmand provinces, these build-ups were identified and disrupted. This was non-kinetic activity: the doctors were told to leave the area and the supplies used to assist the local population. This had a measurable effect on enemy operations in those provinces, but less so in Kandahar or Oruzgan, where the enemy used local government hospitals to handle their casualties.⁸⁰

Another example was the use of special operations forces to identify and monitor the 'ratlines' coming across the Durand Line into Afghanistan. These included the Bahram Chah/Barab Chah region in southern Helmand; an Al Qaeda-built airstrip at Kala Puti in Shorabak district; the Reg Desert, and particularly Spin Boldak, where IED components were passing through. Commanders were monitored going in and out; fighters were observed going in, and casualties seen going out.⁸¹

Throughout June 2006, CTF Aegis noted the changes to the Taliban's behaviour by identifying where the enemy commanders were located and the types of operations being conducted in each province. For example, the deployment of the al-Zarqawi-trained Mullah Hanan's two 15-man cells and Al Qaeda suicide bombers to Kandahar province were a precursor to a higher than normal level of carnage in Kandahar City. If, for example, Toor Naquib's Taliban fighters in upper Shah Wali Kot were not augmented and continued to mount their usual level of ambushes on the Tarinkot road, this could be ruled out as a possible main effort. If Mullah Shakur and his cells in Chenar and Tambil in Khakrez were doing very little, it was likely that they were not a main effort either. However, the presence of Mullah Dadullah Lang in Helmand and Mullah Baradar in Zabul likely meant that coordinated operations against the coalition forces designed for larger effects would follow in those areas in the near future.⁸²

At a higher level, CJTF-76 had to coordinate operations in Regional Command (East) with CTF Aegis's operations in Regional Command (South). At this time, Al Qaeda, and its allies and affiliates had consolidated their positions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North and South Waziristan. If CJTF-76 stripped away forces and resources from Regional Command (East) and sent them to support CTF Aegis, would that embolden

the Pakistan-based insurgents to attack Regional Command (East)? The Canadian liaison staff at CJTF-76 warned CTF Aegis that the divisional-level priorities were: operations in the N2K provinces (Nangarhar, Kunar and Khost); border security zone operations in Regional Command (East); and then operations in Regional Command (South). These were about to change, but CTF Aegis had to plan on the basis that they would not be able to control borrowed or assigned assets, particularly the ISTAR collection systems, indefinitely. CTF Aegis had to be selective about what actions it undertook.⁸³

Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, conceived by CJTF-76, was focused on northern Helmand, Oruzgan and northern Zabul. The objectives were to: defeat the Taliban in what CJTF-76 believed to be its sanctuaries; extend government of Afghanistan governance to these areas; and facilitate NATO Stage III expansion. The main effort was Helmand province. Coalition forces in Helmand were to set the conditions for special operations TF Bushmaster to clear out and defeat the Taliban in the Bagran Valley and western Oruzgan. Operations in Zabul and Kandahar were designated as supporting shaping operations. The key tasks were to kill/capture enemy leadership targets and IED cells and interdict Taliban cells in Kandahar City, Qalat and Lashkar Gah.⁸⁴

Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST: Khakrez District, June 2006

MOUNTAIN THRUST involved practically all of CTF Aegis's operating forces, including TF Orion. TF Orion was scheduled to deploy into northern Kandahar province and cordon and search any potential Taliban sanctuary areas and, in a more general sense, act as a block for any Taliban trying to head south to escape coalition forces manoeuvring in Oruzgan.⁸⁵

There were a number of problems with this approach. The first was the plan did not take into account the fine detail of the mountainous, complex ground and there were simply not enough forces to do a 'fine tooth comb' sweep of the entirety of the designated areas. Second, there was no provision to leave behind an Afghan security and governance presence in the areas that were swept. Third, and most important for TF Orion, Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST would take all of Orion's forces from the mid-province districts and the city and send them up north into districts that did not appear to have any enemy in them. The enemy were building up in Zharey and Panjwayi, not in Khakrez or Ghorak. Yes, the enemy had a presence in Shah Wali Kot, but what were they a threat to? They were not seriously interfering with the Tarinkot road and they were remote from Kandahar City.⁸⁶

It was extremely difficult to convince CJTF-76 of this state of affairs. CJTF-76 had already established their trajectory months ago and had allocated ISTAR and other resources to Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST. Those resources were scheduled to head elsewhere

for a subsequent operation, MOUNTAIN LION, in another regional command. Elements in the CJTF-76 staff were not convinced that the Zharey/Panjwayi problem was important enough in the schema of its larger objectives.⁸⁷

The Afghan government in Kandahar province disagreed with CJTF-76 and devised several means of convincing CTF Aegis and TF Orion to mount more operations into Zharey to keep the enemy off balance. There were numerous agendas in play relating to the provincial power structure, not all of them strictly security related, but LCol Hope agreed that there was an emergent problem in the district and lobbied CJTF-76 for another probe into Zharey before Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST kicked off. Operation JAGRA conducted on 12-14 June 2006 sent C and B Companies back into Zharey. The subsequent gunfight that C Company found itself in was further confirmation that the enemy were getting stronger. In this case, enemy forces held their ground and fought before progressively retreating and then dispersing. That was new.⁸⁸

Unfortunately, the forces did not exist for the coalition to garrison Zharey and Panjwayi districts. The entirety of TF Orion moved north for MOUNTAIN THRUST. There were no Afghan National Army kandaks made available to Kandahar province. The American-trained kandaks were not sent to Kandahar and either went to Regional Command (East) or protected Kabul. That left the various 'police' forces, most of which were little better than tribal militias and ill-equipped for counterinsurgency operations, let alone traditional policing. How did a PRT, with a handful of Canadian CIVPOL officers, train and mentor several different partially trained Afghan police forces that were in nearly daily contact with insurgents throughout the province? Where were the German-trained police from Kabul? The inability of the Canadian government to leverage influence in Kabul or with its allies to get more resources for Kandahar province or convince CJTF-76 to alter its perception during this time demonstrated a significant weakness in Canada's ability to integrate government departments and generate synergy in the capital to achieve security objectives in Kandahar province. It fell to the men and women of TF Orion and their successors to bear this burden.⁸⁹

TF Orion deployed to northern Khakrez district on 12 June 2006. (See Figure 10-6)

There was virtually no contact as A and C Companies conducted exhausting cordon and search operations. After several days of inconclusive operations, TF Orion prepared to return south to KAF. A LAV III was struck with a massive mine stack, severely wounding the crew and destroying the vehicle. At the same time, a LAV III from TF Orion's tactical HQ was hit with a pressure-plate IED in Ghorak district. Then two G Wagons from the tactical headquarters were disabled by a suicide vehicle-borne IED on entry into the city, wounding two Canadians and killing nine Afghan civilians. While TF Orion was distracted up north, the Taliban continued their preparations in Zharey district.⁹⁰

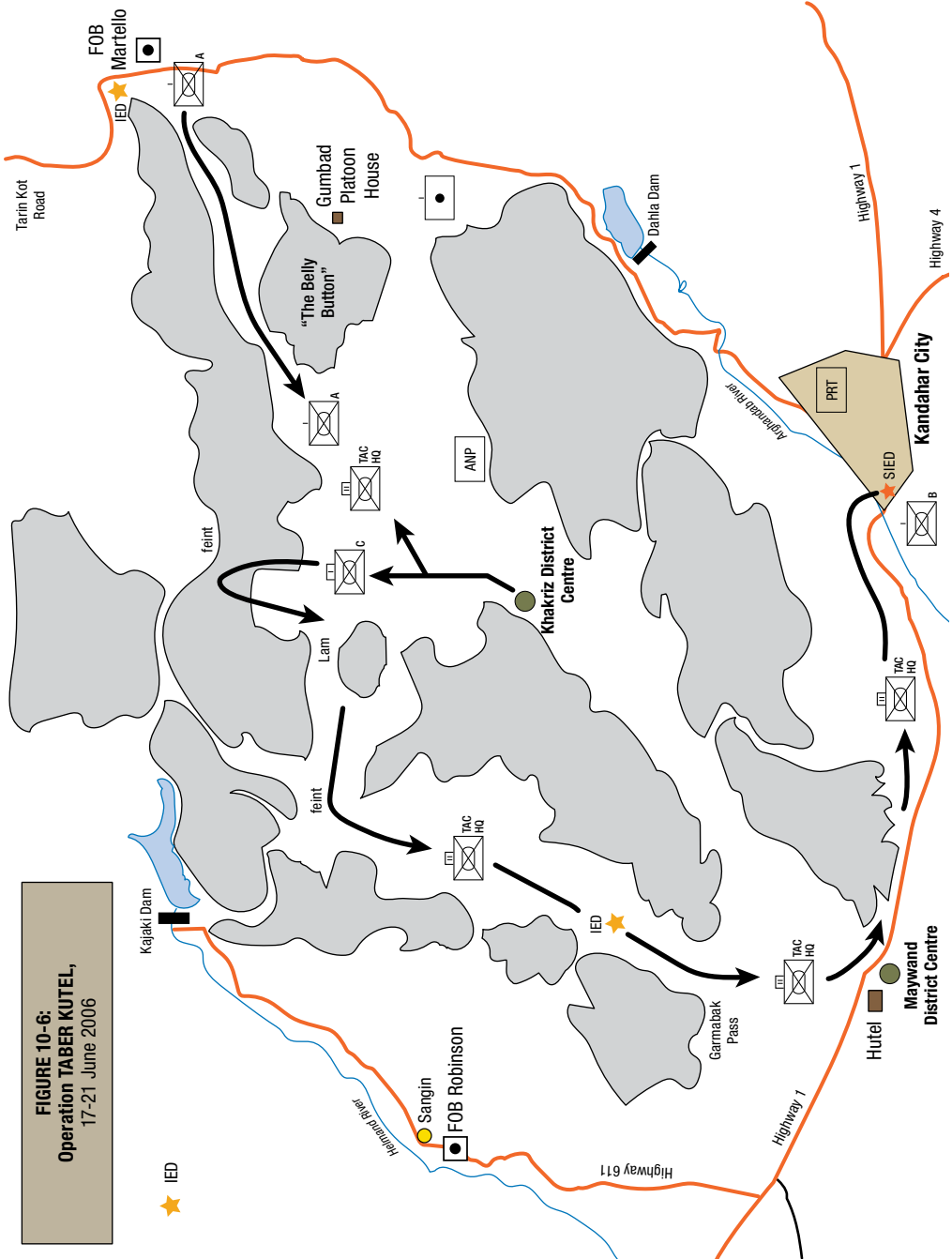


FIGURE 10-6:
Operation TABER KUTEL,
17-21 June 2006

Figure 10-6: Operation TABER KUTEL, 17-21 June 2006

Northern District Operations, June-July 2006

As part of CTF Aegis's ongoing operations in northern Kandahar province related to Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, one area of interest was the Chenartu Valley, which lay east of the Tarinkot road part-way to Zabul province. Chenartu was the scene of a successful SOF operation in December 2005 that bagged several Taliban leadership targets and demonstrated that the coalition could reach into nearly inaccessible valleys at will. A similar notion underpinned this operation. Chenartu Valley was an elongated green zone that could only be reached by air or by what amounted to an expanded goat trail. There were intelligence indicators that Shah Wali Kot district Taliban regrouped there and that other Taliban organizations from Oruzgan and Zabul used the valley as a meeting point. Operation TABER POLAD was a complex operation involving TF Orion, the Afghan National Police, and TF Knighthawks, the U.S. Army aviation unit belonging to CJTF-76.⁹¹

The scheme of manoeuvre had C Company air assaulting into two blocking positions, while A Company and the police searched the valley. The main challenge was adhering to TF Knighthawks' demands, which stated that their helicopter landing zones had to be secured by vehicles that had mounted weapons on them first before they would land. Clearly, this meant that there would be no surprise, so the TF Orion staff struggled to find a way to meet this criterion.

Recce Platoon and the snipers deployed south-east from FOB Martello toward their designated blocking positions. Once their RG-31s and G Wagons were in position, several CH-47 Chinooks escorted by AH-64 attack helicopters swooped in with C Company: half at the north end of the valley, and half to the south. The Sperwer TUAV orbited waiting for "squirters." A Company and the Afghan police, followed by C Company's LAV IIIs, deployed south down the Tarinkot road, and then east down the trail to the south end of the Chenartu Valley. The operation caught the enemy's early warning system by surprise and they struggled to find IED specialists to respond to the incursion.

As the Afghan police moved into its blocking positions, C Company started an exhaustive cordon and search operation in the north, while A Company worked its way from the south. There were several intelligence hits, but the Taliban insurgents who were in the valley went to ground and did not take on TF Orion. The searches turned up nothing and no enemy were identified by the intimidated population. Once again, without a significant and capable security presence, the population would not side with the government or coalition forces. After two days of operations, Operation TABER POLAD was called off. On the way out, enemy IED specialists laid devices on the extraction route but the ECM systems on the Canadian vehicles defeated all of them. This led to a variety of frustrated communications among the insurgents.

As TF Orion re-cocked from TABER POLAD, an important decision had to be made. The Gumbad Platoon House, established in the Gun Devils days and maintained by TF Orion, was increasingly problematic because of its remote location. Gumbad was a draw on Canadian resources and was difficult to resupply. Most of TF Orion's personnel and vehicle casualties up to this point were taken in its vicinity. At the same time, there was a governance presence in the new district centre. There was a small number of police and Afghan National Army troops located there. Gumbad became an example of the dilemma faced by not only TF Orion but also subsequent task force commanders; Gumbad was expensive and there was potential regarding long-term campaign objectives, but given short-term developments in Helmand and around Kandahar, was it as important? If TF Orion left the area after several months of security and governance operations, the enemy would come in and demonstrate to the population that they were now in control. Word would spread throughout the district that the coalition and government forces were weak. The facts of the situation, that there were not enough forces to go around and there were higher priorities, would be irrelevant to the local population.

As hard as it was, the decision was taken to remove Canadian Forces from Gumbad. However, TF Orion could not just walk away from a fortified platoon house. There were concerns that the enemy would occupy the facility and would use it as part of their information operations offensive – “Look, we defeated the Canadians in Gumbad. Here is their base and we occupy it!”⁹² A deliberate operation to dismantle the Gumbad Platoon House had to be mounted. To provide cover for the dismantling, a Village Medical Outreach operation was conducted at the same time. Doctors, dentists, veterinarians, psychological operations operators and Afghan security forces were flown in by helicopter to assist the locals while a ground force based on C Company moved in to dismantle the base. There were no casualties, but harm was done to the long-term relationship between the government forces and the local population in Shah Wali Kot. Overall, it was the correct decision but that was cold comfort to the local population.⁹³

There were longer-term ramifications to the withdrawal from Gumbad. In subsequent years, whenever Canada pulled out of a combat outpost or dismantled a platoon house, Canadian media commentators branded the move as a “retreat” and demonstrative of a loss of coalition control. This would later place pressure on the Canadian chain of command in Ottawa and force it and the forward headquarters in Afghanistan to expend valuable resources and time over-analyzing the domestic political impact of every potential tactical

re-distribution of forces. Of course, the chain of command could not explain to the media, and thereby to the enemy, that the forces were stretched thin, and they certainly could not divulge what the coalition's future priorities were going to be. The public affairs world was less than stellar in explaining these realities and ultimately the perception that Canada was constantly "retreating" took hold in the Canadian media with substantial detrimental effects over time.⁹⁴

Although Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST was inconclusive in the Canadian area of operations, there were significant effects elsewhere. Maj Gen Freakley noted that

We did kill several of the key enemy leaders in the south, out in Helmand Province primarily. There were ten guys we targeted out there. We killed four and drove the others out of the country. By October they were back, all six because of British inactivity. However, MOUNTAIN THRUST enabled the British and the Dutch and the Romanians to come in basically unimpeded. [this work was done by] TF Bushmaster, the fighting the Canadians and the US did.... But we did not get a lasting effect.⁹⁵

Operation ZAHAR: The Battle of Pashmul, 7-9 July 2006

CTF Aegis and TF Orion had to deal with two problems that emerged simultaneously. In late June, there was a significant increase in insurgent activity in the Musa Qala and Kajaki districts in Helmand province. Then the security contractors at the vital Kajaki hydroelectric dam deserted. There were further indicators that security in the Sangin area was increasingly problematic. The situation produced a debate between the British commanders and the Helmand political leadership as to what the response should be. Should 3 PARA head north out of its designated operating areas around Lashkar Gah or not?⁹⁶ At the same time, TF Orion's B Company detected an insurgent build-up in Zharey district back in Kandahar province. The difference now was that there were more Taliban leaders coming in and defensive preparations were underway in the district. ISTAR indicators suggested that there was linkage between events in central Helmand and events in Zharey district. One possibility was that the Zharey force would interdict Highway 1 to prevent resupply and generate 'spectaculars' in Kandahar City, while the Helmand insurgent force would draw British forces north and then move on Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, or take on the still-deploying British task force and defeat it as it entered the field piecemeal.⁹⁷

Operation HEWAD (“Homeland”) was a contingency plan established by CTF Aegis to address the central Helmand problem. Part of that contingency plan was called Operation AUGUSTUS, a sub-plan designed to neutralize the enemy leaders if they came together in the Sangin area to plan or parlay with local groups. TF Orion was, on its own, already working on a contingency plan to go back into Zharey district and disrupt whatever the enemy were doing: that plan was called Operation ZAHAR (“Sword”). Orion, however, had a role to play in HEWAD and AUGUSTUS, and then all activities had to be coordinated with Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, the CJTF-76-led operation in Oruzgan province and adjacent areas. What fell out of all of this was that TF Orion would, in effect, disengage from Shah Wali Kot, go into Zharey district and disrupt the enemy there, re-cock, and then head west to Helmand to support the British operations in Sangin.

The intelligence picture for Operation ZAHAR came together on 5 July. Enemy leaders were going to meet in the Pashmul area, consolidate control of the district, and then mount a series of ‘spectacular’ operations against Kandahar City while interfering with movement on Highway 1. Coupled with the build-up detected by Maj Grimshaw’s B Company and other resources, LCol Hope decided it was time to mount Operation ZAHAR.

Operation ZAHAR drew on all of the lessons learned so far from TF Orion operations in the province. The primary lesson was that there was an effective enemy reporting network in and around Kandahar City and it had to be ‘spoofed’ before the battle group could converge on the target areas. Unlike previous operations, ZAHAR would employ all three infantry companies. Again, previous operations demonstrated that surrounding a target area in constricted terrain using surprise would improve the chances of catching and destroying enemy forces.

On the night of 7 July 2006, TF Orion’s infantry companies moved back and forth through Kandahar City to confuse the enemy early warning network. Right before midnight, A Company and Recce Platoon moved to Patrol Base Wilson (with a CIMIC vehicle taking fire while moving through the city), while B and C companies moved to the district centre in Bazaar-e Panjwayi in Panjwayi district. The M-777 guns were set up in positions along Highway 1. A company of Afghan National Army troops from northern Afghanistan and their American embedded trainers were split up; an Afghan platoon was assigned to each Canadian company. The Afghan police were not invited on this operation for operational security reasons. (See Figure 10-7)

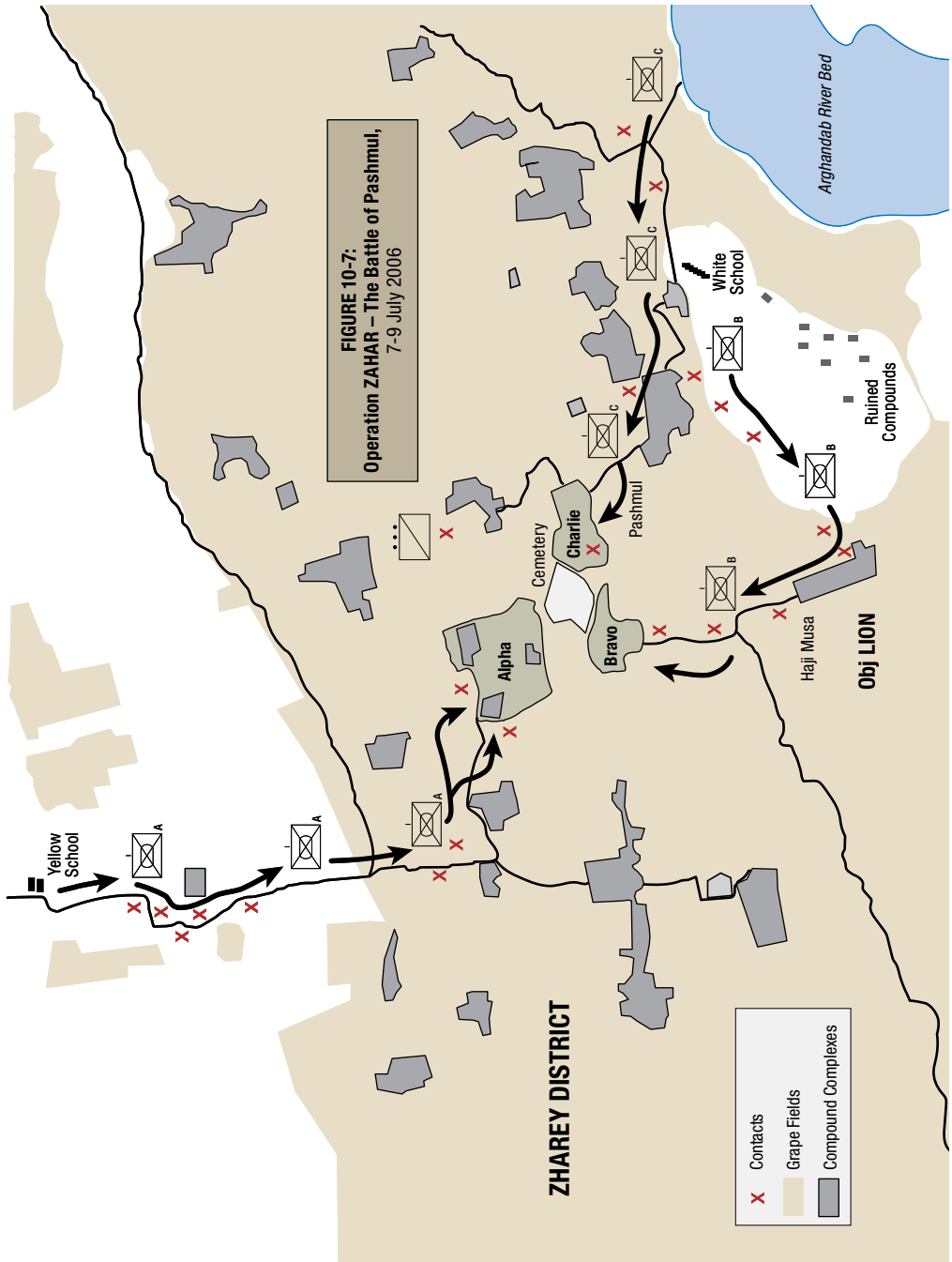


Figure 10-7: Operation ZAHAR – The Battle of Pashmul, 7-9 July 2006

TF ORION deployed at midnight. Maj Gallinger's A Company headed west down Highway 1 and abruptly turned south into the narrow lanes between the vineyard trenches. Maj Bill Fletcher's C Company crossed the Arghandab River and established a 'foot' on the ground at the crossroads short of the bazaar south of Pashmul, while Maj Grimshaw and B Company prepared to pass through C Company and head west into its blocking positions.

The firing started immediately on all fronts. A Company vehicles were shot at five minutes into the operation, as was C Company. C Company stood firm and pumped 25mm fire back from its lead LAV IIIs. A Company's column of LAV III and G Wagons moved slowly along the dark lane, turrets traversed left and right, engaging enemy RPG teams with night optics. Women and children started to stream out of the battle area. While C Company continued to fire at its targets, B Company moved west but was heavily engaged from the south and west by RPG teams and machine gun fire. As it turned out, all three companies were engaged by an enemy covering force deployed in a circle around Pashmul. The enemy attempted to send small numbers of reinforcements on motorcycles to back up the covering force but these were engaged and destroyed as they attempted to move into position. The fighting lasted all night as the companies jockeyed to get into position opposite their target areas, designated Objectives ALPHA PUMA, BRAVO PUMA and CHARLIE PUMA. Recce Platoon moved in from the north east into a blocking position and apprehended a number of enemy personnel attempting to escape the onslaught.

At first light, the three companies with their accompanying Afghan troops dismounted and advanced toward the objective areas. All three came under machine gun fire, while C Company was hit with indirect fire from mortars and RPGs as well. The close quarters fighting saw RPGs being employed by both sides at minimum ranges. The interlocked compounds coupled with the extreme heat kept progress slow. Then the enemy counterattacked, trying to exploit a seam between B Company's platoons, a move that surprised the Canadian leadership and was a further indicator of an enhanced enemy tactical capacity. The fighting on all objective areas continued well into the morning, with A Battery's M-777 guns, U.S. Army AH-64 attack helicopters and U.S. Air Force A-10 fighter-bombers brought in for support.

During the course of the action, Cpl Anthony Boneca, a reservist from the Lake Superior Scottish Regiment was shot and killed during C Company's assault on a compound. An MQ-1 Predator UAV from the U.S. Air Force's 62nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Flight was brought in and dropped a Hellfire missile on the structure, which ignited ammunition and burned the building. This was the first instance of a Canadian joint terminal attack controller guiding an AGM-114 Hellfire released from a UAV – and it

would not be the last. In A Company's area, small teams of insurgents tried to flank the main assault and interfere with water resupply or otherwise generate disruption to slow down the momentum of the assault. These moves were countered by the company headquarters and resupply continued.

Combat engineers slowly cleared the compounds throughout the day. Maj Trevor Webb's combat engineers uncovered IED-making material and abandoned enemy command posts. Enemy personnel, fragmented and killed by various Canadian weapons systems, were discovered throughout the battle area and attempts were made through CIMIC local engagement to dispose of the remains in a culturally appropriate fashion. ISTAR assets attempted to track where the enemy were so they could be re-engaged. Indicators suggested that a number of them escaped to Objective LION, the village of Haji Musa southwest of Pashmul. Plans were made to converge on Haji Musa the next morning. At the same time, there were clearer indicators that some enemy were able to exfiltrate west before the cordon could be completely put in. Unfortunately, TF Orion's ability to pursue given the constricted terrain was minimal. A sweep into Haji Musa following a PSYOPS mission turned up enemy equipment and medical supplies, but the insurgents had already departed. There was no further contact that day.

While TF Orion engaged the enemy in Pashmul, the Governor of Kandahar and various police units in the city raided numerous mosques that were suspected of supporting the insurgency; 156 people were detained, of which 50 remained in custody. The combination of ZAHAR and the mosque raids completely disrupted enemy plans for their Tet-like operation. Indeed, one estimate suggested that three or four enemy leaders were taken out of action by Operation ZAHAR. Two of these were wounded, exfiltrated, and later died elsewhere. Note that these leaders were brought in to replace earlier losses, specifically from the Baqi Network, and probably included IED specialists. B Company, after the operation, queried its local sources and concluded that there were 200 enemy insurgents present between Pashmul and Siah Choy to the west. When all was said and done, approximately 50 were killed or later died of their wounds. A Company apparently clipped the close protection party of an enemy leader on the way in and he departed the combat area, rendering him ineffective and his bodyguards dead.⁹⁸

Operation ZAHAR was the first successful operation that seriously disrupted the enemy build-up west of Kandahar City and it bought the coalition time to deal with the deteriorating situation in Helmand province. Operation ZAHAR was also the first instance where the whole Canadian battle group was brought together and engaged in a singular combat operation: a significant night action in complex terrain.

CHAPTER TEN



Photo Credit: Author

Operation ZAHAR (7-9 July 2006) was the first Canadian major combat operation conducted involving the entire battle group. It was mounted at night in complex terrain against defended positions. A Company 1 PPCLI deploys from its vehicles and comes under fire from Objective ALPHA PUMA.



Photo Credit: Author

LAV IIIs pour 25mm fire onto Objective ALPHA PUMA.

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Photo Credit: Author

A Company vehicles fire on an enemy flanking move.



Photo Credit: Author

Canadian infantry advances to flush out the insurgents.

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Photo Credit: Author

C and A Companies move to clear Haji Musa the next day.



Photo Credit: Author

A Hellfire missile launched by an MQ-1 Predator kills the insurgents that mortally wounded Corporal Tony Boneca from C Company 1 PPCLI during Operation ZAHAR.

Operation AUGUSTUS: Into the Sangin Valley

While TF Orion was conducting Operation ZAHAR, a series of developments in Helmand province fed into what would become Operation AUGUSTUS. As part of Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, American special operations TF Bushmaster moved into northern Helmand province, getting the enemy to move and disrupting their operations there and in western Oruzgan province. The logistics support element for TF Bushmaster, situated north of the Kajaki Dam, was ambushed. Then a Tier I SOF raid intended to take out enemy leadership in the Sangin area went wrong, resulting in the loss of an MH-47 helicopter. At the same time, a British infantry company from 3 PARA got pinned into the Sangin district centre by insurgent forces in the city. The combination of these events meant that original British reconstruction operations in south-central Helmand had to be suspended.⁹⁹

Adjustments were made to the original HEWAD plan. The air assault against enemy leadership targets north of Sangin, Operation AUGUSTUS, would occur simultaneously with a relief operation to the Sangin district centre. TF Bushmaster, which had been in the field for a protracted period and was needed for the next in the MOUNTAIN series of operations to be held in Regional Command (East), had to pass through the Sangin operating area, be escorted down to and along Highway 1, and from there it would return to Regional Command (East). CTF Aegis planners had to make sure all of this happened as smoothly as possible. 3 PARA, an airmobile force equipped with limited ground mobility, would be unable to handle all of these moving parts. As a result, TF Orion, augmented with an American Hummer-mounted infantry company from TF Warrior, 1-2 Infantry in Zabul, was brought in.

What did all of this mean in the bigger picture? To prevent a collapse of the coalition position in Helmand, CTF Aegis had to strip Kandahar and Zabul provinces of the bulk of their 'kinetic' task forces and redeploy them to central Helmand. In the original campaign plan, those task forces were originally supposed to escort and support their respective PRTs in their development, reconstruction and governance activities, and to help with mentoring the Afghan security forces. Almost all of those activities had to be suspended in all three provinces. TF Orion was also scheduled to take over from the French SOF down in Spin Boldak. That also had to be put on hold (the French eventually departed without conducting a proper handover to TF Orion, leaving a vacuum in this critical district).

The outline plan had TF Orion establishing blocks to the east and south of the AUGUSTUS target area. (See Figure 10-8)

FIGURE 10-8:
Operation AUGUSTUS – Helmand Province,
 12-17 July 2006

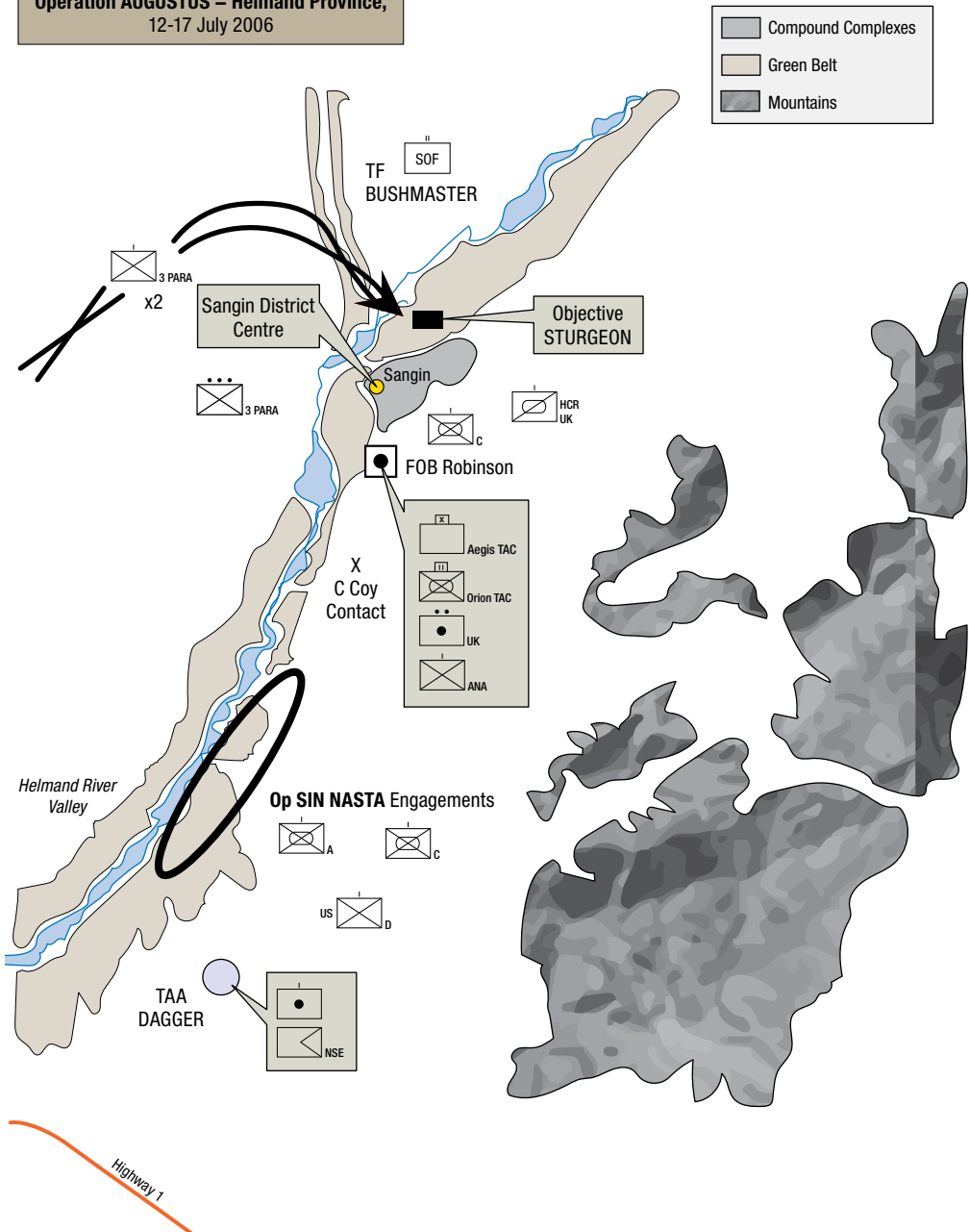


Figure 10-8: Operation AUGUSTUS – Helmand Province, 12-17 July 2006

TF Bushmaster would handle the northern blocks. 3 PARA would air assault into the target area, and then a Canadian infantry company would shift to relieve the Sangin district centre. TF Orion would then cover TF Bushmaster as it re-deployed to eastern Afghanistan. Afghan security forces participation would be negligible as the Afghan National Army and Afghan police would not release forces from elsewhere in Afghanistan for operations in the south. This was unfortunate. A key part of the plan was a sub-plan called RANA led by the CTF Aegis Political Advisor, Pam Isfeld, which envisioned a ‘super shura’ led by the Afghan PTS amnesty coordinator, the legendary Dr. Mojadedi. The idea was to shift the Sangin population’s loyalty toward the government and ‘reconcile’ insurgents in the Sangin region. All in all, the Helmand operation became a multinational, brigade-sized operation involving significant elements from four separate battle groups plus most of their associated combat service and fire support, led by the Canadian-commanded CTF Aegis. This was a significant milestone, but produced additional pressures on CTF Aegis HQ.

The initial moves for Operations HEWAD/AUGUSTUS were shrouded by a dust event on 12 July 2006, which altered the timelines. LCol Hope used the dust storm as cover and was able to infiltrate the bulk of TF Orion undetected into central Helmand and without incident. AUGUSTUS was put on hold, so TF Orion mounted a series of disruption operations from tactical assembly area DAGGER designed to keep the insurgents guessing as to where TF Orion would go next.



Photo Credit: Author

Using a sand storm to mask its movements, the entire battle group deployed virtually undetected to Tactical Assembly Area DAGGER in Helmand prior to Operation AUGUSTUS. AUGUSTUS was designed to trap and eliminate the insurgent leadership in central Helmand Province. 1 PPCLI conducted several raids from this TAA, thus disrupting enemy operations south of Sangin.

There were several significant encounters with insurgent forces in the Hyderabad area, collectively referred to as Operation SIN NASTA. A Company crossed the Helmand River into the western Green Belt on several occasions to disrupt and C Company raided compounds suspected of housing enemy leadership to the east of TAA DAGGER. The American company from TF Warrior worked the Pasab area, conducting similar operations. SIN NASTA generated numerous enemy casualties, personnel that would have been employed against FOB Robinson and Sangin if they had been left unmolested. During one of these forays, TF Orion's Recce Platoon took a casualty and medic Private Jason Lamont, without cover fire, dashed across an open field to administer first aid. He was awarded the Medal of Military Valour. At this point, CTF Aegis' mobile headquarters, callsign 99, moved through TF Orion and set up in FOB Robinson in Sangin. It was promptly mortared the evening of its arrival, but the British 105mm guns based at the forward operating base responded, hitting the baseplate and the fire stopped.



Photo Credit: Author

LCol Ian Hope and BGen David Fraser plot their next moves at Tactical Assembly Area DAGGER in Helmand on 12 July 2006 prior to moving on to Sangin. 48 hours later, TF Orion was forced to turn around and head south to Nawa and Garmsir districts and retake a pair of captured district centres. These operations in Helmand prevented the complete collapse of government control in critical areas.

Intelligence indicators pointed toward a built-up area designated STURGEON east of Sangin as the most likely area for insurgent leadership to meet. On the night of 15 July 2006, covered by B-1Bs, A-10s and MQ-1 Predator UAVs, British CH-47 Chinooks escorted by AH-64 Longbow Apaches made their way from Camp Bastion and conducted an air assault into Objective STURGEON. TF Bushmaster was blocking to the north, while C Company with an Afghan platoon and a British Scimitar light tank squadron from the Household Cavalry screened to the south. The RAF Chinooks took some fire on the way in

but eventually had the company from 3 PARA on the ground and the searches commenced. C Company got hung up on a water obstacle after a culvert collapsed but the vehicles that were able to cross continued on.

The presence of a LAV III Company, ISTAR reportage indicated, deterred the enemy from sending in truck-mounted reinforcements. As it turned out, the 3 PARA Company came up with nothing. The enemy leadership targets pulled out at some point and were not present in Objective STURGEON. Speculation was that they were warned by agents in the governor's office. Two bodies and four wounded civilians were found but these casualties were generated by an MQ-1 Hellfire strike that was not associated with Operation AUGUSTUS. The frustrated Paras called in the Chinooks and departed for their base, leaving C Company alone on Objective STURGEON to prepare to enter the built-up area of Sangin and relieve the besieged Paras in the district centre. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a B-1B dropped several precision-guided munitions on a compound south of FOB Robinson. CJTF-76 now instructed CTF Aegis to conduct a sensitive site exploitation of that site.

Part of C Company was diverted to the strike site where they encountered a volley of RPGs and a substantial number of enemy prepared to fight to cover the withdrawal of whatever leadership targets had been in the compound complex. After killing about 50 insurgents with their 25mm cannons, the decision was made to re-vector C Company back into Sangin. Canadian M-777s fired on several insurgent build-ups on the west side of the river as C Company made its way into the city to relieve the district centre garrison. Dr. Mojadedi was then flown in but the 'super shura' was poorly attended and its effects were, unfortunately, limited.

A Pathfinder patrol from 3 PARA then stumbled across the escaped enemy leadership targets that were hiding in a mosque. These men had survived a Tier I SOF strike, dodged the Operation AUGUSTUS forces in Objective STURGEON, and had survived a B-1B unloading JDAMS on their compound. They were the heart of the insurgency in Helmand province at that time. The Pathfinders frantically tried to get CTF Aegis to bring in an airstrike. The staff worked through every possible option but rules of engagement established and enforced by CENTCOM prohibited an airstrike on a mosque. The enemy leaders slipped away once again to cause untold levels of violence and disruption over the following years.

The situation as it stood was this: TF Bushmaster, located north of Sangin, was at the limit of its logistical endurance, and had to return to Regional Command (East) to refit for the next 'Mountain' series operation. B Company TF Orion was keeping an eye on things in Zharey district back in Kandahar and reports started to come in that the enemy had flowed back into the Pashmul area. A and C Companies, TF Orion, plus the TF Warrior Company from Zabul that was accompanying it were moving toward Tactical Assembly Area DAGGER on Route 611 in Helmand. 3 PARA was consolidating the

Sangin district centre and its various platoon houses, and had their air assault company back at Camp Bastion. The Dutch continued to deploy into Oruzgan province. BGen Fraser's 99 TAC had already packed up and was returning to KAF. Another drama, however, was about to unfold.

Operation CAUCHEMAR: Retaking Garmsir and Nawa

On the night of 17 July 2006, the staff at CJTF-76 alerted the CTF Aegis Joint Operations Centre that two district centres in southern Helmand province, Garmsir and Nawa, were under attack. President Karzai was on the phone and demanded that coalition forces retake the two facilities. One view was that the district centres were symbols of governance; this was a direct challenge to the authority of the Karzai administration, and the situation had to be dealt with promptly or the Kabul government would lose face. The more sober view was that these two attacks were in exactly the opposite direction, not to mention some distance, from Sangin; they were probably designed to draw off CTF Aegis forces from the north and thus relieve pressure on the insurgent leadership that was pinned down somewhere around Sangin. The political pressure was immense so CTF Aegis planners led by LCol Shane Schreiber and Lt Col Mark Brewer crafted an immediate response for BGen Fraser's approval.¹⁰⁰ (See Figure 10-9)

The situation as it stood that night highlighted CTF Aegis's plight. As previously stated, there were four battle groups for four provinces. There were virtually no Afghan National Army forces and the police were little more than unreliable re-uniformed militias. Operation AUGUSTUS drew TF Orion out of Kandahar province, and a significant part of TF Warrior out of Zabul province. The Dutch task force was in the process of deploying and would not mount operations in a piecemeal fashion. The Romanians were responsible for the security of KAF. The British forces in Helmand lacked ground mobility and were dependent on a relatively small number of helicopters. TF Bushmaster, which did not belong to CTF Aegis, had returned to Regional Command (East). The bulk of CTF Aegis was committed to Helmand, which left the other three provinces vulnerable – and seriously reduced their ability to conduct PRT operations because their protective forces were gone.

The only force that could react in a timely fashion to these attacks was TF Orion. TF Orion was mounted in LAV III and had the proven capability to deploy anywhere in Regional Command (South)'s area of operations. It had a mobile logistics capability and the means to operate TUAV at long range using its mobile ground link. The issue was: where, exactly, were Garmsir and Nawa? TF Orion and the Canadian force had a very limited ability to move map data or other imagery and was mostly limited to voice communications or maps dropped off by helicopter. Even if TUAV could find the two sites, it had to send its camera feed back to KAF to the TF Orion Tactical Operations Centre who would have

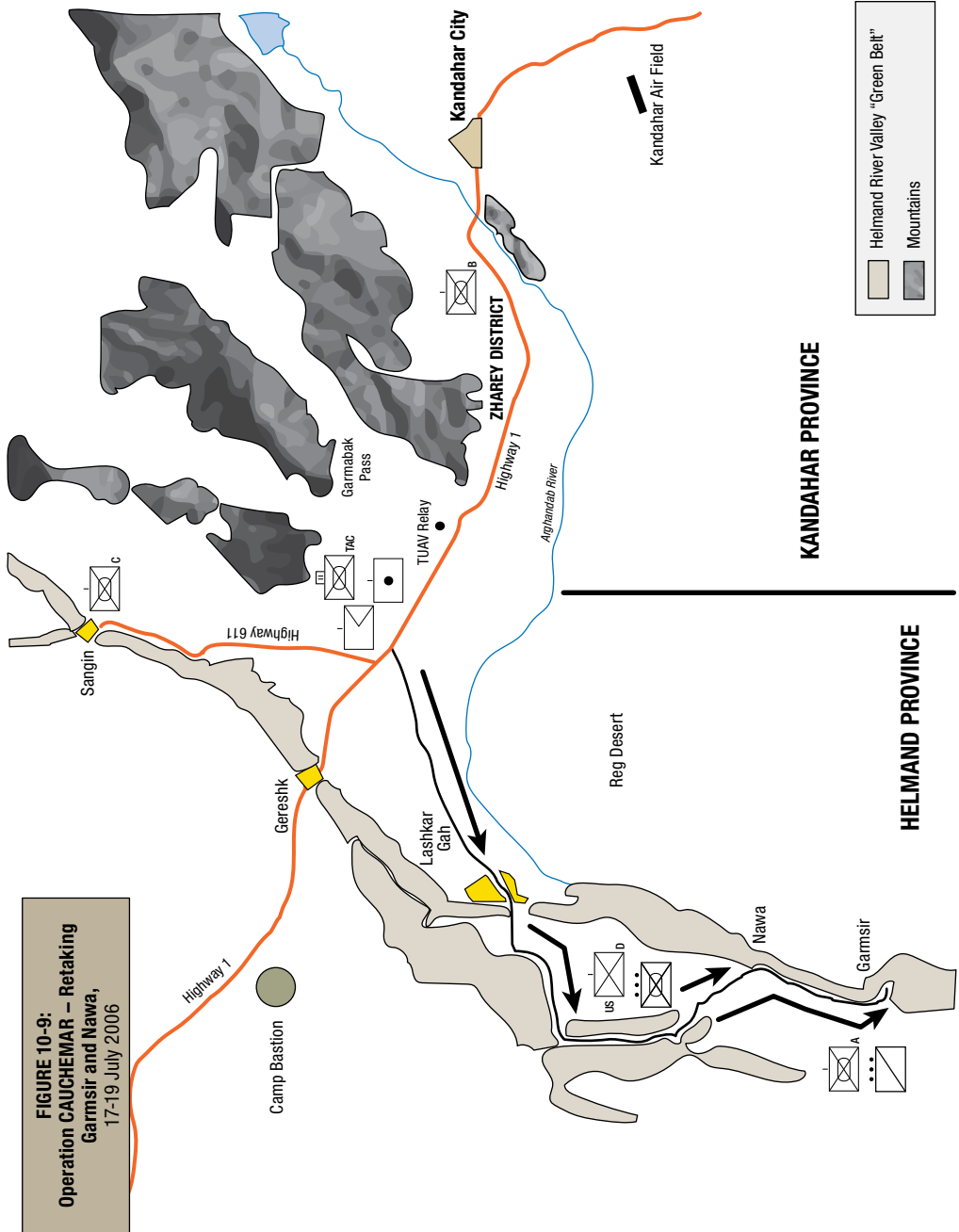


Figure 10-9: Operation CAUCHEMAR – Retaking Gamsir and Nawa, 17-19 July 2006

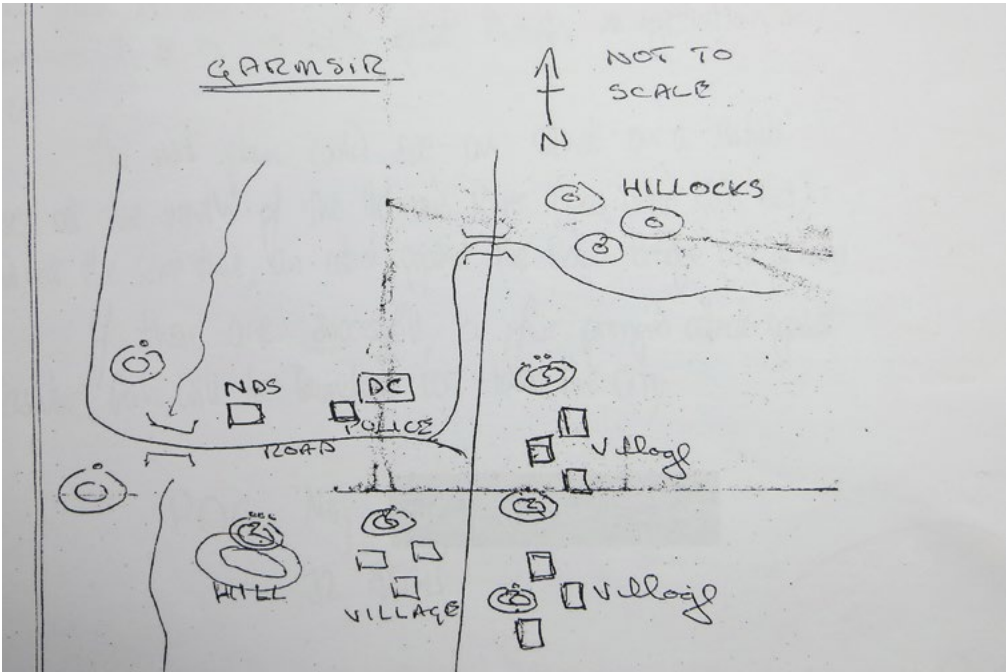


Photo Credit: Author, from Major Kirk Gallinger

This sketch was the only geographical information that A Company had to work with for the assault to retake the Garmsir district centre in Helmand province during Operation CAUCHEMAR in July 2006.

to print out the information, and then call TF Orion on the radio to arrange for a drop-off by helicopter, which Canada did not own. There was no means at this point in the conflict to move real time imagery from TUAV to a terminal in the field commander's vehicle.

The TF Warrior Company with TF Orion, however, was mounted in up-armoured Hummers and lacked long-range firepower – but unlike TF Orion, they were equipped with Blue Force Tracker and FalconView and thus had the ability to move data to their vehicles from higher headquarters using an Internet relay chat system. These systems had been in use by the U.S. Army since at least 2003. LCol Hope was able to get MQ-1 Predator imagery and FalconView map data from TF Warrior in order to plan what became known as Operation CAUCHEMAR. A jpeg sketch was made available to the company commanders.¹⁰¹

This was an extremely risky operation not just for TF Orion but CTF Aegis, which had the bulk of its combat power committed to Helmand province from three other provinces. Garmsir and Nawa were south of the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah. Lashkar Gah was an urban environment with no bypass road. That was not all. TF Orion would have to cross the Helmand River at Lashkar Gah, head west then south, and then enter a Green Belt that consisted of not one but several irrigation systems, that crisscrossed the whole area – innumerable culverts, bridges and fords, and thus presented innumerable potential IED opportunities.

Nawa was on the west side of the river – that was good. But Garmsir was east of the river. TF Orion would have to conduct an assault crossing to get into the town. And then there was the logistics trail for all of this. LCol John Conrad's NSE had to be able to support this from KAF: beans, bullets and gas. TF Orion was now operating at the end of its rope. Without helicopters, everything had to go by road – “jingle” trucks and barely armoured 14-tonne transports. The need for imagery rather than maps was readily apparent – maps labeling the Green Belt as “numerous ditches” were less than helpful.

A Company and the TF Warrior company refueled and re-ammunitioned at an NSE logistics leaguer on Highway 1, while LCol Hope and his staff planned the next moves on 18 July. Maj Gallinger would move and retake Garmsir. C Company was still engaged in Sangin, so Devil Company from 1-2 Infantry was tasked with re-taking Nawa. A LAV III platoon was detached to them to provide longer-range firepower as the American company was mounted in Hummers. Capt Jon Hamilton's Recce Platoon, a joint terminal attack controller, and an Afghan National Army platoon with American embedded trainers joined A Company. Maj Steve Gallagher's M-777s arrived as well.

The force deployed as soon as it was ready on 18 July 2006. There was supposed to be a link-up with the Helmand police in Lashkar Gah, but no one arrived at the rendezvous, so TF Orion pressed on west across the river and south into the Green Belt. There was no contact along the canals and compounds. Devil Company and the Canadian LAV III platoon cleaved off and headed for Nawa, while A Company continued south.

Nawa, as it turned out, was virtually empty. A Company approached Garmsir, however, with the LAV III platoons in an extended line. The insurgents, who had been alerted to TF ORION's movements by spotters using mirrors, opened fire with a combination of machine guns, RPG and mortars. The LAV IIIs opened up with 25mm fire as the joint terminal attack controllers called in A-10 fighter-bombers and JDAMS. A Company's troops even broke out 60mm mortars and started lobbing rounds back. This firefight lasted until darkness fell. There was an estimated company-sized enemy force in a built-up area, and the only way to get at them was cross the only bridge in the area. Maj Gallinger decided discretion was the better part of valour and chose to wait until morning so that Maj Webb's combat engineers could clear the bridge of demolitions. That night, 2 Platoon engaged and destroyed an enemy patrol that crossed the river.¹⁰²

At first light, the engineers and 3 Platoon cleared the bridge and set 2 Platoon and Recce Platoon across into Garmsir. There was no resistance and no shooting. A block-by-block search commenced but Garmsir was deserted. Blood trails and large numbers of body parts were found, enough to estimate that there were about two platoons of insurgents present during the night. Several large caches of ammunition, including large RPG caches, were found as well as a number of IED factories. ISTAR reportage indicated that several

insurgent leaders had gone to ground in the local population. TF Orion had moved so quickly that the insurgents were unable to prepare a proper defence of the town in time. To ensure that the enemy remained off-balance, TF Orion maintained constant patrols and probes in the surrounding areas for several days afterwards.

Columns of Afghan police and 3 PARA soldiers eventually arrived in each town to reconstruct the district centres and police stations, as information operations personnel touted the victory at Garmsir in the various media. The Afghan National Army and their embedded trainers were ordered to stay in Garmsir so TF Orion mounted up and headed back to Highway 1 and home to Kandahar. The NSE packed up its mobile logistics leaguer near Highway 611 and headed east. As the columns wound their way into Kandahar City, a suicide vehicle-borne IED struck an NSE Bison. Cpl Francisco Gomez and Cpl Jason Warren were killed in the attack.

Operation CAUCHEMAR achieved its objectives in that two burning buildings in remote districts were retaken and the Karzai government's 'face' was restored, but at the expense of two Canadians killed. LCol Hope's decision to leave C Company up north in Helmand ensured that not all coalition forces were refocused on the feint. This meant that the insurgent leadership in Helmand did not regain freedom of movement in Sangin as it hoped to, thus introducing friction into their plans. At the same time, however, the whole Helmand adventure reduced the focus at CTF Aegis and CJTF-76 away from insurgent activities in Kandahar province, specifically Zharey district.

On 1 August 2006, CJTF-76 and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM transferred authority over CTF Aegis and its forces to the NATO-led ISAF. TF Orion and the other organizations in CTF Aegis were now part of ISAF. Stage III expansion was then complete and a major strategic objective in the war in Afghanistan was achieved. The international coalitions were, on the face of it, one step closer to unity of command. On the other side of the Durand Line, the Quetta Shura quietly announced it was taking, in Canadian terms, an 'operational pause.'¹⁰³

Operation BRAVO CORRIDOR and the Second Battle of Pashmul, 3 August 2006¹⁰⁴

While CTF Aegis and TF Orion were manoeuvring around Helmand, B Company was holding down the fort in Kandahar City while keeping Highway 1 west of the city open for supporting movements. During that time, Maj Grimshaw, Capt Jay Adair and the B Company staff; Maj Erik Liebert at the PRT; Maj Harjit Sajjan; and Capt Walter Jull from 2 (EW) Squadron were all, in their various ways and means, keeping an eye on developments in Zharey district. They independently arrived at the conclusion that the insurgents were, to various degrees, reconstituting in the eastern part of the district.

The rest of TF Orion and the NSE returned from Helmand to refit: A Company went back north to FOB Martello, while C Company prepared to move in and fill the void left by the French SOF in Spin Boldak. All TF Orion elements now could see their redeployment home to Canada on the horizon. The relief in place with 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (1 RCR) would occur in the next few weeks.¹⁰⁵

However, the violence level along Highway 1 significantly increased in the waning days of July. There was daily contact between B Company and the insurgents; this even included complex ambushes, one of which was nearly two kilometres long. Some new form of directional IED was in use and no one had seen one like it before. This surge in enemy activity was troublesome to CTF Aegis, as the British were pouring troops into Afghanistan and firing them out the door from KAF, through the city and along Highway 1 heading west to Helmand. Operation BRAVO CORRIDOR was prepared by TF Orion to disrupt enemy activity in Zharey district along Highway 1 and push down to Pashmul, if possible. BRAVO CORRIDOR was activated on 1 and 2 August with two platoons from B Company and a platoon from C Company. There were not enough forces to keep the road open and move to Pashmul with the impending relief in place, so the focus became the highway instead of Pashmul as the British deployment through the area was deemed a priority.

While BRAVO CORRIDOR was underway, however, additional pressures developed on TF Orion. LCol Hope was in contact with Governor Asadullah Khalid. Khalid was concerned that the grape harvest season was imminent and there were large numbers of displaced locals that had to get back into Zharey so they could tend to the crops. Landowners were exerting significant political pressure on Khalid. Everything possible had to be done to drive the insurgents out of Zharey so the people could return. Information then came in from police sources that enemy leadership, perhaps senior leadership, would meet once again in the Pashmul area and prepare for further operations against Kandahar City. There was additional information that appeared to confirm that such a meeting was a real possibility. This combination of pressures led to altering BRAVO CORRIDOR beyond its original parameters while it was in progress.¹⁰⁶

LCol Hope looked at the situation. The problem of Zharey district was not going to go away. Ideally, he wanted to conduct a relief in place with 1 RCR in Pashmul itself, if he could get TF Orion in there. That would keep the enemy off balance and away from an area they wanted to control. There were far too many convergent aspects of the operational, political and tactical situation at this point in time for a commander to walk away from the area. There was, however, divergent opinion on what was going on in Pashmul:

Some believed that the information from the police was faulty at best, a trap at worst. They noted the defensive preparations that had been taking place over the past couple of weeks, the response by the enemy from the manoeuvre to collect near Ma'Sum Ghar and believed that the enemy was just waiting for TF Orion to make another go at Pashmul from the south. Elements in the intelligence world, ones that were hostile to TF Orion's independent intelligence collection efforts, sided with this view. Another intelligence organization not related to Aegis or Orion concurred. Others disagreed. They believed that the enemy was so disrupted with the goings on in Helmand and in Zharey that they would move away from any force coming in to avoid a fight, flow west, wait for the coalition forces to leave, and then flow back in. There were attempts to take the matter up a level to CTF Aegis and get the headquarters to postpone the operation.... Eventually, [BGen] Fraser, who was in Kabul, came back to Kandahar, took a look at the arguments, and approved the operation.¹⁰⁷

TF Orion was spread thin; FOB Martello in the north was facilitating the Dutch deployment to Oruzgan, C Company was partially deployed to Spin Boldak and B Company was in Patrol Base Wilson holding Highway 1 open. There were also other significant changes. The transfer of authority from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to ISAF meant that the command relationships between the Afghan National Army and their embedded trainers and CTF Aegis were now non-existent. The 209 Corps forces from northern Afghanistan headed home. More importantly, American intelligence and special operations forces enablers that were part of the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM structure were now no longer accessible to CTF Aegis in either the quantity or availability that they had been. American route clearance packages, critical for clearing IEDs, were redeployed for American operations elsewhere in Regional Command (East).

The TF Orion plan envisioned a pincer movement on Pashmul. B Company would move in from the north, while a composite company made up of platoons from C and A Companies plus Recce Platoon would cross the Arghandab River from Bazaar-e Panjwayi from the south and link up in Pashmul. There were no Afghan National Army forces, so Afghan National Police were acquired from various sources. The Canadian M-777 guns were made ready and the Sperwer TUAV, now the only full motion video surveillance asset available, was launched (though eventually some MQ-1 Predators became available).

After a series of deception moves, TF Orion's forces deployed. The southern and northern forces launched at 0400 hours 3 August 2006. (See Figure 10-10)

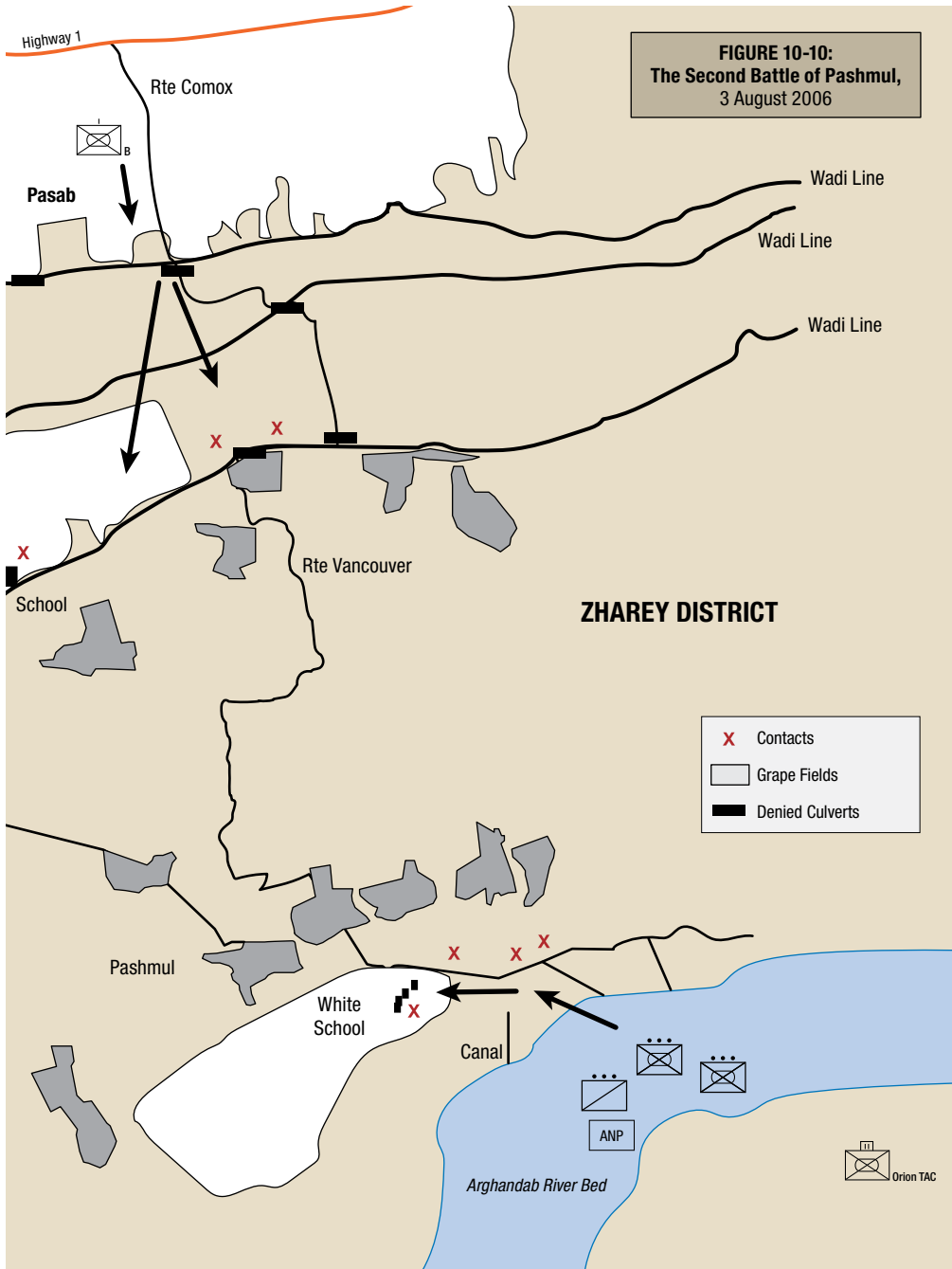


Figure 10-10: The Second Battle of Pashmul, 3 August 2006

At 0405, 9 Platoon from C Company with about 30 Afghan police officers in tow engaged the enemy early warning system as the LAV IIIs crossed the Arghandab River, drove up the ford and approached the crossroads east of the White School and the Pashmul Bazaar. Ten minutes later, a LAV III struck an IED, disabling the vehicle, killing Cpl Chris Reid and wounding WO Shaun Petersen, the platoon leader. This was followed by a high volume of fire from insurgent positions near the crossroads directed at the vehicles. To the north, B Company sent its first LAV III over the wadi line on a small culvert bridge near Pasab. The insurgents detonated the culvert, trapping the LAV III and its crew. B Company realized, once it deployed, that all of the ways and means they usually used to cross the wadi lines in eastern Zharey had been either removed or otherwise rendered impassable by the enemy. A high volume of enemy fire also greeted B Company.¹⁰⁸

Intelligence passed to TF Orion from the Mobile Electronic Warfare Team then indicated that a major insurgent leader, Haji Lala, was trapped in the White School near the Pashmul Bazaar. LCol Hope ordered his forces forward, with the Afghan National Police in the lead, in a bid to apprehend Lala. A second LAV III that was manoeuvring at this time struck a pressure-plate IED and was disabled. Recce Platoon was ordered to lay down fire to the north of the crossroads to give the stricken LAV space so the wounded could be extracted and the vehicles recovered, and then swing west and head for the White School. LCol Hope called CTF Aegis and requested an artillery show of force from the M-777 guns behind the school to discourage whoever was in it from leaving.

This request was denied. It was only then that TF Orion realized that the rules of engagement under ISAF, as opposed to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, were much more restrictive. Inexplicably, a Canadian staff officer added even more restrictions approximating peace-time danger radii, and this essentially prohibited any artillery engagement near any structure whatsoever. Such rules of engagements were clearly unrealistic in a built-up environment.

CTF Aegis then asked the Dutch to send in their AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to provide support. In northern Pashmul, as in the south, B Company had no route clearance package. When the enemy detonated the culvert, combat engineers probed forward the old-fashioned way with metal detectors and prods. B Company was stalled until someone could figure a way across the wadi and irrigation systems. The engineers went back to Patrol Base Wilson and grabbed every piece of wood or other item that could be dumped into the ditches to get the LAV IIIs and G Wagons across.

At 1130 hours, with the August heat climbing and climbing, dismounted elements from 9 Platoon, Recce Platoon, and the Afghan police advanced to clear the White School, with a pair of Dutch AH-64s orbiting high up over Pashmul. The insurgents reported on their communications means: “Thank God they are finally here!” and unleashed fusillade after

fusillade of fire on the Afghan and Canadian forces, followed by mortars. 9 Platoon fired back but the Afghan police broke and ran. The Dutch Apaches tried to engage with their automatic cannon but because of their national rules of engagement, they were too high up to be effective.

Meanwhile, the TF Orion reserve arrived in Bazaar-e Panjwayi. LCol John Conrad deployed a mobile recovery column (low-bed trailers and Bison recovery vehicles as there were no LAV III recovery vehicles in existence), EOD resources and Capt Hugh Atwell's 7 Platoon. A QRF platoon, 1 Platoon led by Lt Ben Richard also arrived. Capt Kevin Barry took over and moved forces to secure a security bubble around the stricken LAV IIIs so they and their crews could be extracted.

Around 1230, the platoon-sized Canadian force approached the White School, and they were engaged by approximately 60 enemy insurgents from three sides: north, west and south. Capt Jon Hamilton and the platoon went to ground in the school's outbuildings and fired back. Then another enemy force opened up on the LAV III recovery site, pinning down the forces so they became focused on the new threat and not on what was happening with the manoeuvring platoon. LCol Hope requested artillery support to cover the platoon in the school. This support was once again denied by CTF Aegis. The Dutch AH-64s would not fire weapons below their rules of engagement-fixed altitude and were unable to provide any fire support either.

Ten minutes after fire support was denied, a volley of RPG rounds struck the outbuildings, killing Sgt Vaughan Ingram, Cpl Bryce Keller, and Pte Kevin Dallaire. Six others, including Recce Platoon leader Capt Hamilton, were seriously wounded. Many of the others were suffering from the effects of the extreme heat by this time.

Meanwhile, B Company's 4 and 5 Platoons were engaged in a major firefight east of the other White School near Pasab.¹⁰⁹ Maj Grimshaw tried to get artillery support against the enemy located near the school, but there was confusion in the fire support coordination elements over this school and the Pashmul school, in addition to the rules of engagement issue. There were continual struggles between LCol Hope, Maj Gallagher, and CTF Aegis on how to get fire support to both the northern and southern fronts during the fight.

The extraction of the wounded in the Pashmul school was paramount. The Taliban fighters were emboldened enough by the situation to start streaming into the school from the west. LCol Hope was able to get acquiescence on an M-777 shoot against the enemy forces surrounding the Pashmul school from Maj Gallagher. Hope knew that the route between the strike site and the school was probably strewn with IEDs, but there was now no choice. MCpl Matthew "Kiwi" Parsons, a LAV III driver, understanding the potential lethality of the situation, volunteered to take his LAV III in and conduct an extraction. MCpl Tony Perry in another LAV III prepared to follow in MCpl Parson's wheel tracks; if Parsons LAV III hit an IED, Perry would continue on to the besieged wounded. Lt Ben Richard's platoon linked up and prepared to cover the two LAV IIIs.

Then, in an unexpected manoeuvre, a huge USAF B-1B strategic bomber conducted a low-level show of force pass down the Arghandab River, the four engines kicking up what little water there was and shaking up Pashmul. At 1300, the first artillery round finally landed on the enemy forces near the Pashmul bazaar. Enemy fire slackened. With MCpl Parsons in the lead, the extraction force moved out across the open field and backed up to the outbuildings, ramps down. The dead and wounded were loaded up under a heavy volume of fire while a small team of soldiers led by Sgt Patrick Tower fired back with everything they had to cover them, including their dead comrades' weapons. Sgt Tower was awarded the Star of Military Valour for his actions. Sergeant William MacDonald who assisted his wounded comrades while exposing himself to fire during this action, was also awarded the Star of Military Valour.

As U.S. Army UH-60s medical evacuation helicopters landed at the casualty collection point TF Orion established in the river bed, a civilian vehicle slowly drove into Bazaar-e Panjwayi from the east. Lt Doug Thorlakson, the NSE Transport Platoon commander who was commanding the mobile recovery column staged on the road, had a bad feeling. The car's driver gunned the engine in place. Thorlakson opened up with his Bison-mounted C-6 machine gun, walking rounds toward what was evidently a suicide vehicle-borne IED. The bomber was hit but was able to detonate his vehicle. The blast wounded two Canadian soldiers from the NSE and killed 26 Afghan civilians in the bazaar. Lt Thorlakson was wounded in the attack, but the recovery column was able to carry out its mission.

B Company's advance was completely stalled. They were finally able to get some A-10 close air support to cover the extraction of their LAV III from the other side of the wadi. To the south, the TF Orion platoons formed a blocking force as ISTAR reportage indicated that the insurgents were preparing a multi-wave assault on the forces still occupying the river bed. This assault did not materialize: the LAV IIIs fired at anything that moved with their 25mm cannons.

By 1600 hours, the two stricken LAV IIIs were extracted back to the river bed and then to Bazaar-e Panjwayi. There were numerous wounded and dead. With no effective fire support, no Afghan National Army or police in support, no up-to-date intelligence from the All Source Intelligence Centre or other sources about what he was facing in Pashmul, LCol Hope decided to withdraw TF Orion from eastern Zharey district and wait for 1 RCR to arrive to conduct a relief in place.

The Aftermath of 3 August 2006

The events of 3 August were nothing short of shocking. TF Orion took significant casualties in men and materiel, with four dead and over a dozen wounded. CTF Aegis's procedures for fire control under NATO ISAF restrictions were worse than useless; they were negligent and contributed to those casualties. The enemy achieved the psychological

boost they needed after their progressive defeats in the Battle of Pashmul and in Helmand in July. The Taliban that were now ensconced in eastern Zharey district were very different from the enemy that TF Orion sparred with in May-June-July. They were dug in. There was an obstacle plan covered by fire; the insurgents were able to use a suicide IED cell as deep strike fire support, almost as an analogue to artillery. The enemy had mortars for indirect fire and could control them. Moreover, the enemy were coordinated in ways unseen thus far in southern Afghanistan, adjacent to Highway 1 and within range of Kandahar City.

From a campaign perspective, however, the 3 August battle had unanticipated and significant positive effects. Recall that Mullah Naqib in Arghandab district acted as “kingmaker” whenever a force moved on Kandahar City in the past. The key to this concept, though not fully understood by CTF Aegis and TF Orion at the time, was that the Alikozais and their allies in Arghandab district led by Mullah Naqib essentially determined who controlled Kandahar. Historically, whoever they sided with took control of the city. Ironically and inadvertently, TF Orion’s operations in Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot districts north of Arghandab disrupted any connections or support from the northern provincial insurgent groups provided to Taliban sympathetic elements in Arghandab district at this time.

Naqib and others were keeping a close eye on the fighting in Zharey district. They were concerned that the coalition forces might not be able to contain the Taliban and were making preparations to shift sides if the circumstances warranted it. Arghandab and its inhabitants could be difficult adversaries. In May-June 1987, communist forces numbering 6 000 troops launched an offensive into Arghandab. They sustained 500 killed or wounded, 30 armoured vehicles destroyed and between 5 and 16 helicopters shot down. Nearly 1 200 of the attacking Afghan communist troops changed sides along with their weapons, which in turn prompted the Soviet command to pour several thousand more troops into the district to quell the insurgency.¹¹⁰

Western coalition planners tended to view Kandahar province as a series of discrete districts. The lines delineating each district became part of a mental map and could easily fragment how one views the situation. In this case, provincial district maps depicted Arghandab and Zharey districts as completely separate areas, almost detached from each other. In the Afghan view, they were both part of a continuum from Dahla Dam down to Maywand district. The triangular Green Belt of Zharey did not suddenly stop: it tapered off into Asheque and Senjaray, which then seamlessly transitioned into lower Arghandab district. (See Figure 10-11)

An Afghan view perceived the enemy activity in eastern Zharey as a prelude to a move on Asheque, Senjaray, Arghandab and then Kandahar City. The psychological effects of the enemy getting into Arghandab district might have been enough to get Naqib to change sides and then the enemy would be able to get right into the city itself in force or otherwise affect the population psychologically.

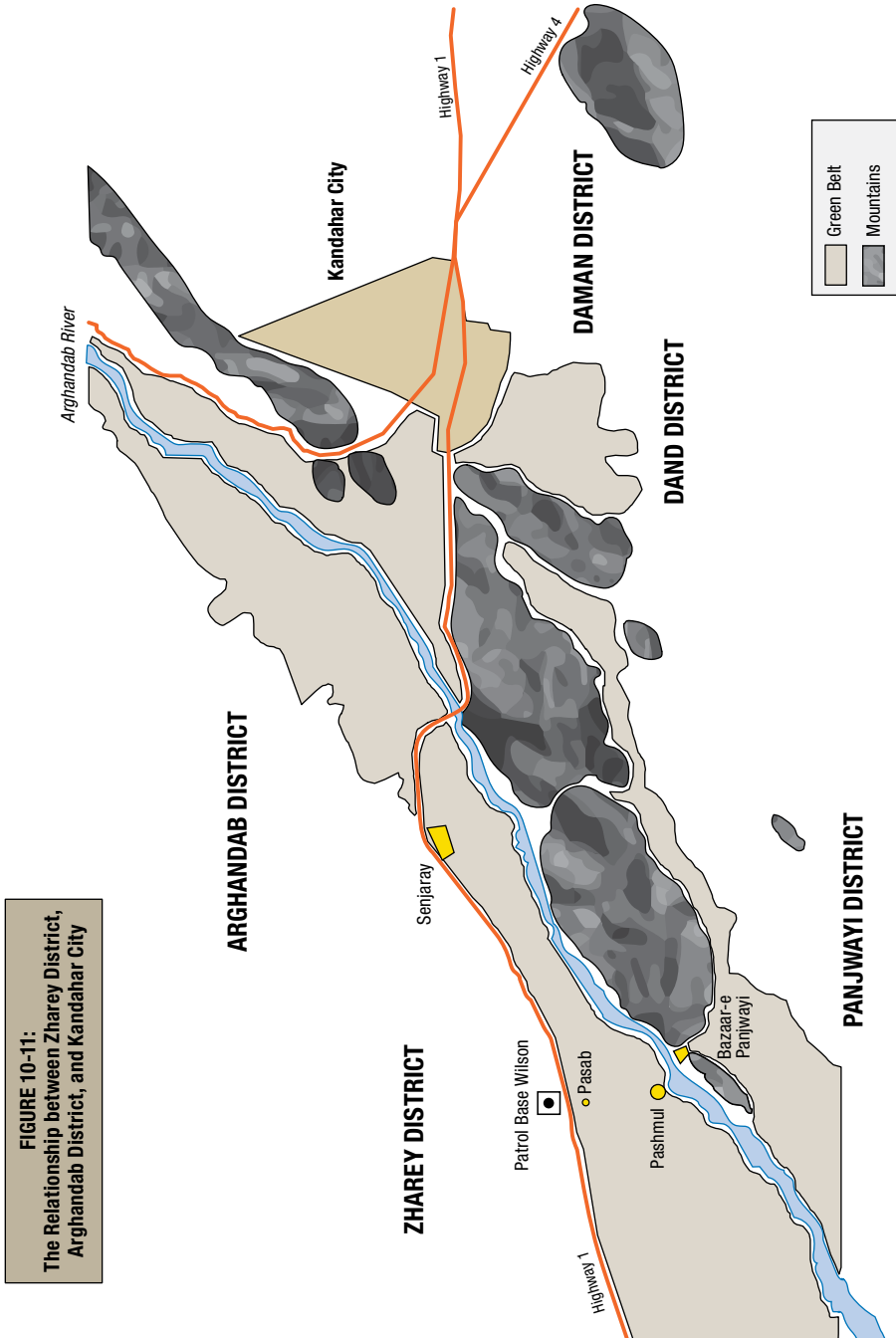


FIGURE 10-11:
The Relationship between Zharey District,
Arghandab District, and Kandahar City

Figure 10-11: The Relationship between Zharey District, Arghandab District, and Kandahar City

The 3 August battle impressed those Afghan leaders who were considering withdrawing their support from the coalition and the government: this was conveyed by Mullah Naqib, Ahmad Wali Karzai and Asadullah Khalid to the senior Canadian commanders in mid-August after the battle.¹¹¹ The TF Orion battle on 3 August, to them, demonstrated strength and a willingness to bleed. It checked, in the Afghan view, the eastern progression of the Taliban toward Arghandab, even if the TF Orion intent was something very different. Indeed, and the next volume will depict, Mullah Naqib and his supporters would pay a heavy price over the course of the next year for not changing sides. This had serious ramifications for the people of Arghandab district, their leaders and the course of the campaign.

At the strategic level, the 3 August battle shook up ISAF HQ in Kabul. According to Canadian staff officers, this particular headquarters was operating in a world detached from the one that CTF Aegis and TF Orion were fighting in in southern Afghanistan. Many had been lulled into believing that southern Afghanistan was some form of stabilization operation instead of counterinsurgency, despite the extant facts to the contrary. Elements in ISAF HQ criticized Operation ENDURING FREEDOM for being “too kinetic” and wanted operations in the south scaled back so that “development” could take precedence. However, the enemy were not interested in acquiescing to ISAF HQ’s agenda. Stage III expansion was now complete, but was ISAF HQ really capable of adapting to what was really happening down south? The battle on 3 August was the catalyst for changing the ISAF view in Kabul.

Despite the deaths of four Canadians and the inability of TF Orion to retake Pashmul, the 3 August battle played a significant role in preventing the collapse of the coalition and government of Afghanistan effort in Kandahar province and thus southern Afghanistan. The battle also had long-term effects on the perception of what was happening in southern Afghanistan.

Relief in Place

The dying did not stop, however, for TF Orion. On 5 August 2006, MCpl Raymond Arndt from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, part of the NSE infantry platoon, was killed in a vehicle collision in the city. Then on 9 August, MCpl Jeffrey Walsh from 2 PPCLI died from an accidental gunshot wound. Two days later, the insurgents conducted a suicide attack on a Canadian convoy returning to KAF from Spin Boldak. Cpl Andrew Eykelenboom, a medic who saved the life of Niaz “Junior” Mohammed (a PRT interpreter who lost both legs in an RPG attack earlier in the tour) was killed in his G Wagon by an IED.

TF Orion was in no condition to re-launch a deliberate attack back into eastern Zharey. Indeed, TF 3-06, based on 1st Battalion, The RCR was about to rotate in. What the Ottawa-based planners did not fully comprehend was the impact of the high level of heat in August–September in Afghanistan. They most likely based their rotation planning on Operation PALLADIUM, the Stabilization Force operation in Bosnia where there

were no severe climate and time zone extremes (Afghanistan has an 8.5 to 9.5 hour time difference from Ontario, and a 10.5 to 11.5 hour difference from Alberta, depending on the time of year). This oversight meant that 1 RCR battle group was deploying into an unanticipated volatile situation without time to acclimatize, while the outgoing TF Orion battle group was exhausted from six months of unanticipated high-tempo combat operations. There were large numbers of vehicles in various states of disrepair because the NSE had its personnel and thus its repair capacity capped. There was no way 1 RCR battle group could be immediately launched into eastern Zharey, though contingencies to send in a composite TF Orion/1 RCR force were examined *in extremis*.

Every day the coalition forces waited meant that the enemy in Zharey got stronger. However, every day meant that more information came in, troops could acclimatize, and plans could be formulated. CTF Aegis was in overdrive. The stage was set for Operation MEDUSA.

ENDNOTES

1. This chapter is primarily based on a combination of material collected by the author and by his personal experiences with CTF Aegis and TF Orion during the course of operations in summer 2006. The author was extensively briefed by all elements of both headquarters and moved seamlessly between CTF Aegis and TF Orion observing the planning and then execution of each operation. LCol Ian Hope, and company commanders Majors Gallinger, Grimshaw and Fletcher were interviewed in some detail subsequently. The author also accompanied BGen David Fraser during his movements and briefings on numerous occasions. CJTF-76 commander, Major General Ben Freakley was also interviewed subsequently. For a detailed examination of the summer of 2006, see Sean M. Maloney, *Fighting For Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011).
2. CTF Aegis briefing to the author (Kandahar Air Field, 9 June 2006).
3. TF Orion, "King 65 TIC In Panjwayi" (n/d). See also interview with Major General Ben Freakley (Watertown, New York, 25 April 2007).
4. TF Orion briefing to the author (Kandahar Air Field, 11 June 2006).
5. Interview with MGen David Fraser (Toronto, 18 June 2014).
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. "Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan" (February 2006).
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

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16. Fraser interview.
17. See John Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007).
18. Email from LCol John Conrad to the author (27 February 2012).
19. As discussed in Conrad, *What the Thunder Said*.
20. Ibid., p. 99.
21. Discussion with Major David Keehn (Kandahar Air Field, 8 March 2009).
22. Author's observations of CTF Aegis and TF Orion operations (June-July 2006).
23. Fraser interview.
24. JTF-A "R2 End Tour Report: Counter IED."
25. Notes from LCol Hope to Maloney.
26. Telephone interview with Major Kirk Gallinger (17 September 2009); interview with Major Bill Fletcher (Edmonton, 15 May 2007).
27. TF Orion BUB (5-6 April 2006).
28. Author's discussions at CTF Aegis. The staff indicated that elements from the British and American embassies on the counter-narcotics task force were the primary drivers for CN operations in Afghanistan. Both were warned by CTF Aegis that there was not enough ANSF capacity in Helmand Province and that the population would react badly to counter-narcotics operations.
29. Author's observations at CTF Aegis (June-July 2006).
30. Interview with LCol Ian Hope (Carlisle, 26 August 2008).
31. CTF Aegis Meeting with MGen Rahmatullah Raufi (6 April 2006).
32. Author's observations at CTF Aegis (June 2006). See also RC(S), notes from Ahmad Wali Karzai Meeting (30 March 2006).
33. Fraser interview; Hope interview.
34. Fletcher interview. TF Orion BUB (30 April-1 May 2006).
35. The extent of Taliban influence or control over parts of Helmand Province prior to 2006 remains speculative. Lt Col Stuart Tootal in his memoir *Danger Close* argues that the Taliban controlled the ungoverned spaces of Helmand. Other accounts suggest that the situation was more ambiguous than that, particularly Hafvenstein's *Opium Season*. My experiences in southern Afghanistan from 2003 to 2006 lead me to believe that the situation in Helmand prior to 2006 was far more complex than what *Danger Close* suggests. The implications of who knew what and when regarding what was happening in the province prior to 2006 will become wrapped up in the British post-war 'blame game' over the debacle in Helmand Province. That sort of finger-pointing is next to useless without a detailed study of British decision-making, though British ambassador Sherard Cowper-Coles has taken a first stab at it in his memoir *Cables From Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan Campaign* (London: Harper Press, 2012).
36. CTF Aegis briefings to the author (June 2006).
37. See Fraser interview on Khalid (18 June 2014). Regarding "The Devil That You Know" policy, BGen Fraser used this phrase in a discussion with the author in July 2006 after the author was briefed on this extremely complex situation.
38. Email from LCol Erik Liebert to author (3 November 2015).
39. PRT briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006).

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40. PRT briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006).
41. Multiple discussions between the author with BGen David Fraser, LCol Ian Hope, and LCol Simon Hetherington (Summer of 2006).
42. Author's observations (December 2005, and June-July 2006).
43. PRT briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006).
44. Hope's notes to Maloney.
45. Interview with Major Erik Liebert (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006).
46. PRT briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006).
47. Discussions between the author and Padre Suleyman Demiray (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 July 2006). See also Padre Dime Ray's report, "Reflection on the Importance of Religious Issues for the Future of Afghanistan."
48. CTF Aegis briefing to the author (30 June 2006).
49. Hope's notes to Maloney. See also interview with LGen Mike Gauthier (Ottawa, 17 February 2012).
50. Author's discussion with Afghan Ministry of the Interior personnel (June and July 2006).
51. Author's observations in 2005 and 2006 and interaction with coalition and Afghan personnel dealing with police issues.
52. Author discussions with Major Harjit Sajjan.
53. Calbos interview.
54. To be perfectly accurate, those present said Asadullah Khalid "wet his pants" at the possibilities.
55. Briefing by Colonel Tom Putt to the author (Kandahar Air Field, 20 July 2006).
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Interview with Major Nick Grimshaw (Ottawa, 14 January 2008).
59. Grimshaw interview, Sajjan interview. Discussions between the author and Captain Zia Massoud (June-July 2006).
60. Grimshaw interview.
61. TF Orion reports (17 May 2006).
62. TF Orion reports (18 May 2006).
63. TF Orion reports (20-22 May 2006).
64. Fletcher interview.
65. Notes of a meeting BGen David Fraser and Governor Asadullah Khalid (22 May 2006).
66. Hope's notes to Maloney.
67. TF Orion "Operation YADGAR POR" (n/d).
68. Discussions with Captain Kevin Barry (Kandahar Air Field, 4 July 2006).
69. Briefing to the author (Kandahar Air Field, 4 July 2006).
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.

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72. Author's observations in December 2005, and June-July 2006.
73. Hope interview.
74. The author was an observer and sometimes participant in these discussions in June-July 2006.
75. CTF Bayonet briefing to the author, December 2005; Fraser interviews.
76. TF Orion reports (20-30 May 2006).
77. TF Orion reports (3-5 June 2006).
78. TF Orion reports (28 July 2006).
79. Fraser interview.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid. See also TF Orion reports (9 June 2006); TF Orion reports (2 July 2006); TF Orion reports (10 July 2006).
82. CTF Aegis (2 June 2006), Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST briefing.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Op MOUNTAIN THRUST briefing to the author (Kandahar Air Field, June 2006).
86. The author observed the CTF Aegis and TF Orion planning processes for Op MOUNTAIN THRUST and participated in the Canadian portion of the operations.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. The author's vehicle narrowly avoided the first IED of the day in Ghorak and was in one of the vehicles hit by the suicide IED attack in the early evening.
91. The author closely observed the planning and execution of this operation.
92. Similar events occurred in RC (East) when an American combat outpost was overrun.
93. The author closely observed the planning and execution of this operation.
94. The main proponent of this argument was Grahame Smith with whom the author had vigorous debate on this issue at Kandahar Air Field on numerous occasions. Other less aware or otherwise inexperienced journalists accepted Smith's argument uncritically.
95. Freakley interview.
96. According to Stuart Tootle in *Danger Close*, Helmand governor Daud pressured him to establish platoon houses in the central-northern districts including Sangin. This ran counter to what the original British mandate was, which involved supporting development efforts in and around Lashkar Gah. The British force as established was not flexible enough to do both but Tootle tried to satisfy both masters and in turn stretched his forces thin.
97. The author closely observed the planning and execution of this operation.
98. Interview with Major Nick Grimshaw (Ottawa, 14 January 2008); KPRT report (9 July 2006).
99. The author closely observed the planning and execution of this operation. See also Fletcher and Hope interviews.

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100. The author closely observed the planning and execution of this operation.
101. See handwritten note from Aegis J2 and attached sketch of Garmsir. See also Gallinger interview.
102. Gallinger interview.
103. TF Orion reports (28 July 2006).
104. These are two separate operations, which flowed into one another, as opposed to the tendency by some to conflate the two operations. Additionally, some refer to it as the Battle of Pashmul or even Op MEDUSA. The Battle of Pashmul took place back in July. Some also refer to it as the Battle of Panjwayi, but as it took place in both Zharey and Panjwayi districts, that is also incorrect. Op BRAVO CORRIDOR was a B Company operation that served as the basis for some of the events of 3 August but did not encompass an assault on Pashmul from the south, nor the expansion of the operation beyond company size. In essence, the action on 3 August 2006 had no formal name. It was not part of Op MEDUSA-this operation was formulated as a response to the action on 3 August.
105. This section is compiled from a variety of post-operation storyboards and their notes supplied by 1 PPCLI to the author, plus interviews with LCol Ian Hope, LCol Harjit Sajjan, LCol Shane Schreiber and informal conversations with MCpl "Kiwi" Parsons, LCol Ian Hope, LCol Shane Schreiber, Maj Kevin Barry, and LCol Mason Stalker. The author also consulted an unpublished memoir by Cpl Gordon Whitton (also Mentioned in Dispatches) entitled "Be the Wolf," a draft of which he provided the author in 2007.
106. Hope interview.
107. As discussed in Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan*. There remains considerable controversy regarding the intelligence aspects of this operation. At this point, this is the best summation of the problem available due to ISTAR collection and reportage issues.
108. Grimshaw interview.
109. The "other White School" was also known as the Yellow School. There was substantial confusion at higher headquarters over the two sites as they were mixed up by those not familiar with the ground.
110. David C. Isby, *War in a Distant Country* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1989), pp. 38-39.
111. Fraser, Hope, and Lavoie independently reported this to the author during separate interviews.

MEDUSA:

AUGUST 2006-JANUARY 2007

The high water mark of large-scale insurgent operations in Afghanistan was reached in fall 2006.¹ The Taliban tide lapped at the gates of Kandahar, having been temporarily dyked in early August. Though the insurgency would continue to ebb and flow for some time, the series of Canadian, American, and Afghan operations associated with the code word MEDUSA seriously challenged the enemy's ability to use Zharey and Panjwayi districts to interdict Kandahar City or use them as launch pads for psychologically decisive 'Tet' offensive-like operations during this critical period. These operations also generated significant personnel losses, and thus sapped the enemy's momentum in Kandahar and in adjacent provinces.

As we have seen, TF Orion's earlier actions not only helped define the emerging threat tactically, they called attention to it in the higher offices of the coalition forces in Kabul. TF Orion operations collaterally convinced Afghan power brokers in Kandahar that Taliban "focoism" could be blunted and they need not panic into a state of neutrality or shift sides. The fall operations were in part designed to reinforce this critical psychological/social front. Moreover, according to the incoming ISAF Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) strategy, enemy control of Zharey district would impede the growth of the Kandahar ADZ. The enemy lodgment in eastern Zharey district had to be removed. Coming from the Governor Asadullah Khalid and Provincial Council leader Ahmad Wali Karzai, it was clear that "there can be no reconstruction unless there is security."²

ISAF and the Afghan Development Zone Strategy

In earlier chapters, we examined how Canadian planners were briefed on an American concept called the Regional Development Zone (RDZ) in which synergy would be generated in designated populated areas between the various reconstruction and development organizations, governmental and non-governmental, with the whole effort protected by coalition forces working with Afghan security forces. The RDZs, as they were known, were supposed to be linked to the PRTs, who would coordinate the reconstruction activity. By 2005, the RDZ concept was defunct as there was no funding and no bureaucracy to support it. The Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan in Kabul was working toward a solution to the high-end coordination issue in order to get international investors: this was the Afghan National Development Strategy. In early 2006, when Lt Gen David Richards took

command of ISAF, the RDZ idea was rejuvenated and rebranded. The RDZs became ‘Afghan Development Zones’ and were linked to the emergent Afghan National Development Strategy. The Policy Action Group, which brought American, NATO and Afghan representatives together to agree on common approaches to the insurgency, discussed the basic tenets of the ADZ strategy in August 2006. President Karzai subsequently approved the ADZ strategy.³

Though many popularly referred to it as the “ink spot” or “ink blot” theory and compared it to British operations in Malaya in the 1950s, this was an over-simplification. The new NATO strategy took the old RDZ concept and refined it. Conceptually, each PRT would identify areas where development and security could be focused – these were usually the more populated areas that also tended to be grouped together. Ideally, the Afghan security forces, police and army, would handle the security of the zone itself, while ISAF manoeuvre battle groups would handle security on the periphery of the zone. Special operations forces would cause disruption outside the zone. (See Figure 11-1)

Crucial to the ADZ concept, however, was the role of governance and the progressive move toward having the Afghans handle the coordination of security and development inside each zone. That was where the ANDS came into play; the ADZ strategy was supposed to be harmonized with the ANDS in every way possible. It was hoped that over time the zones would expand and link up – all over the country.⁴

On 1 August 2006, the ADZ strategy, now called Operation ARGUS RESOLVE (English) and OQAB (‘Eagle’ in Dari) became the baseline strategy for Regional Command (South). CTF Aegis was progressively prepared throughout summer 2006 for its formal acceptance, so it was not a surprise to the Aegis staff. Indeed, the existing CTF Aegis campaign plan fit neatly within the new strategy, in part because Canadian officers were situated throughout ISAF and other coalition headquarters maintaining situational awareness and input.

President Karzai at the time “insisted that no one talk about ADZs publicly, the [international community] strongly agreed.... Defining the zones might lead to attacks before security is in place.” Lt Gen Richards “promised that ISAF would not abandon any key regional centers when the zones were established. He stressed that ADZs are not a defensive concept and that ISAF will carry on offensive operations to drive the Taliban out of their strongholds.”⁵

In Regional Command (South), the baseline ADZ plan was called Operation SATYR PYRRHA. The PRT and Afghan security forces would handle the ADZ itself, which initially consisted of Kandahar City. The Security Zone, which included the districts immediately adjacent to the city, was the responsibility of the battle group, the PRT and Afghan security forces. Outside of that was the SOF Zone (also called the Disrupt Zone), which was everywhere else. Spin Boldak was a quasi-ADZ owing to the unique conditions established down there by Col Abdul Raziq. (See Figure 11-2)

FIGURE 11-1:
Afghan Development Zone –
Security Forces Dispositions Conceptual Model,
 2006-2007

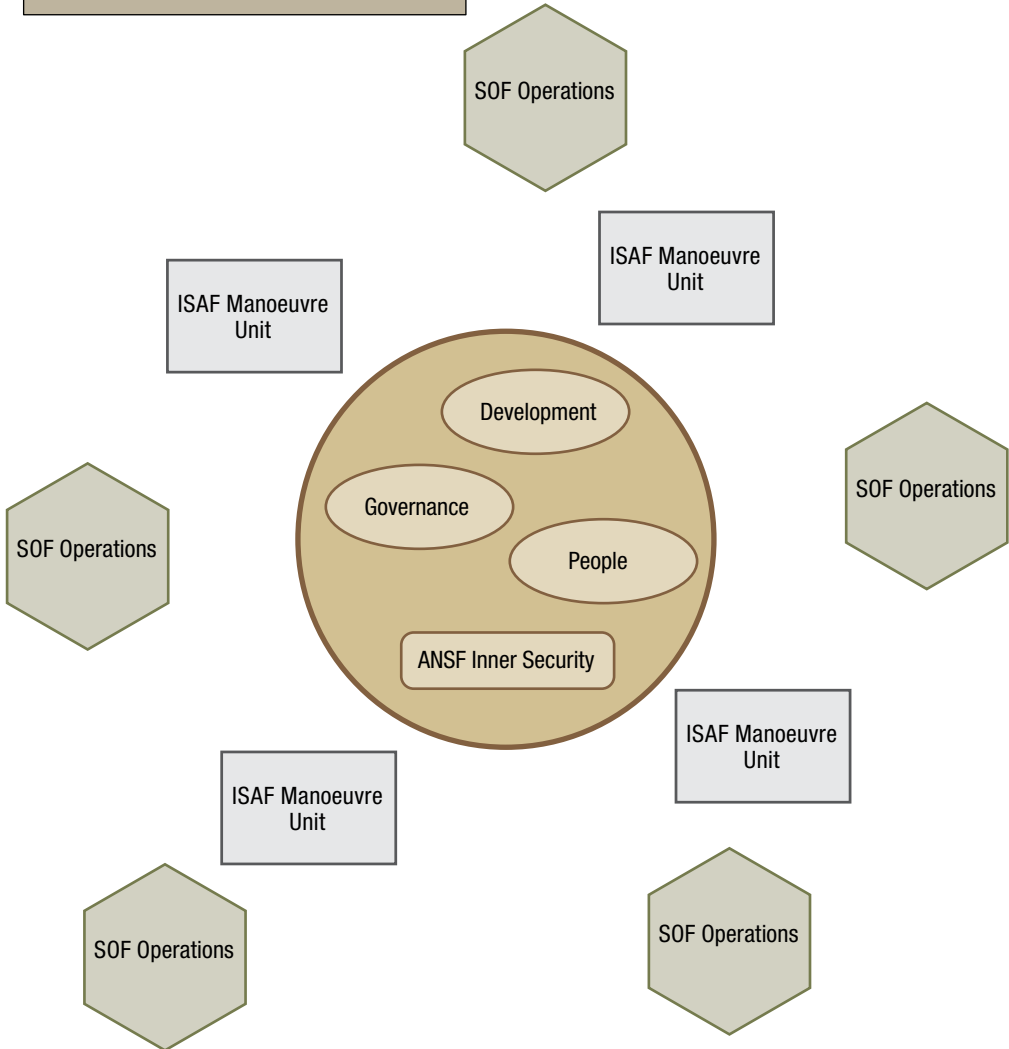


Figure 11-1: Afghan Development Zone – Security Forces Dispositions Conceptual Model, 2006-2007

Unfortunately, as NATO ISAF took over, there were more pressing problems. Operation SATYR PYRRHA, conceived before TF Orion’s battles in summer, was not structured to withstand an assault involving hundreds or thousands of organized insurgents equipped with heavy weapons.

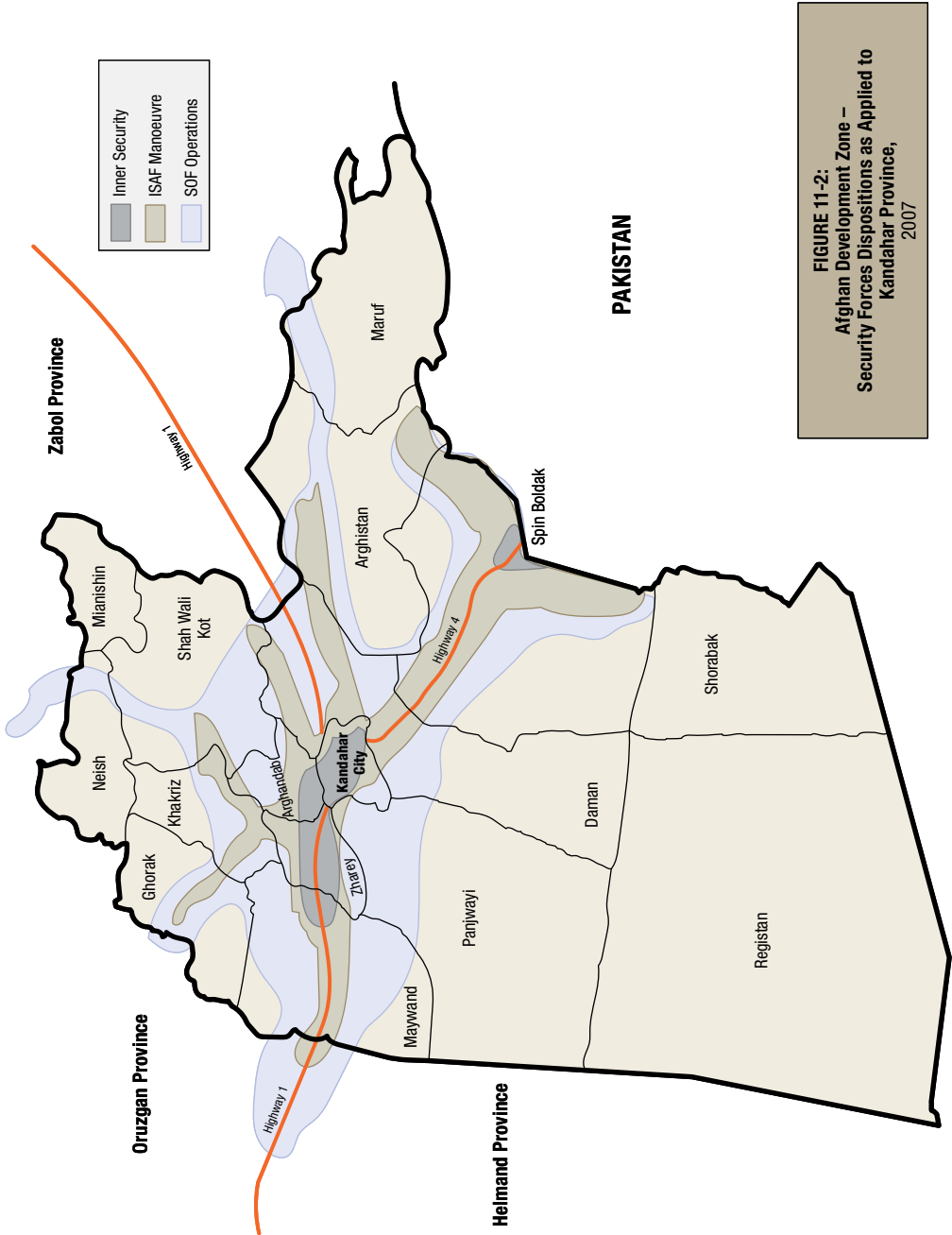


Figure 11-2: Afghan Development Zone – Security Forces Dispositions as Applied to Kandahar Province, 2007

The Genesis of Operation MEDUSA

When the shock of the Second Battle of Pashmul wore off, the first informal sessions by BGen David Fraser's staff at Regional Command (South)⁶ took place three days later focused on what to do about Pashmul. These sessions were the first iterations of what was later called Operation MEDUSA. The realization that the enemy were in a fortified defensive position and was capable of coordinating indirect fire with ground manoeuvre and IED attacks did not distract Regional Command (South) staff from the fact that there were substantial psychological aspects of whatever they instructed their forces to do in future operations. One one hand, there were the Afghans in Kandahar City. There was substantial pressure from the Governor, Assadullah Khalid to get into Zharey and Panjwayi because of the grape harvesting season, the pillar of Kandahar's economic prosperity.⁷

According to LCol Shane Schreiber, "We had a big meeting with the governor and the local tribal leaders. They told us. The governor was straight with us: 'I've got tribal leaders, tribal elders, guys in this room that are making deals with the Taliban because they do not think that you, ISAF, can defeat the Taliban. They have no faith in you; you have all kinds of capability, but not the will.' And that's what it was all about."⁸ The PRT reported that, according to Asadullah Khalid "local perception now is that ISAF is weak and does not want to fight the Taliban, only wanting to carry out reconstruction activity."⁹

At the same time, Lt Gen Richard's ISAF HQ in Kabul, "who didn't really want to hear it," according to Canadian officers, had to be convinced that there needed to be a stand-up fight for the Western approaches to Kandahar City. Why was this the case? For the most part, there "was a biased view [in] ISAF that the Americans under Maj Gen Freakley had done too much kinetic stuff, too much fighting and not enough reconstruction." This view was reflected in the media, which in turn put pressure on national governments from NATO member countries who were themselves confronted with the possibility of dissent on Afghanistan by populations who had been told that Afghanistan was a peacekeeping operation. To make matters worse, the British situation in Helmand was spinning out of control again, prompting the reinforcement of 3 PARA with nearly half a brigade of troops followed by lots of questions from the British media as to what was happening in Afghanistan. This had a spillover effect in Canada, particularly in NDHQ in Ottawa, where "certain elements within [National Defence were] concerned that we've suffered casualties, that it is supposed to be easier than it is and we're fighting while we're supposed to be doing reconstruction."¹⁰

BGen Fraser went to Richards and explained the situation: in effect, the enemy salient in Zharey district had to be reduced in what amounted to a near-conventional operation. There were not enough forces to reduce this threat in Regional Command (South) and achieve the larger objectives related to the ADZ strategy. ISAF asked the French force

commander for assistance. He was prepared to redeploy but was blocked by his superiors in Paris. The same thing happened to the Germans. Brigadier Ed Butler was able to cut loose a handful of troops to backfill 1 RCR, but was tied down in Helmand. Richards eventually told Fraser, “I can’t give you anything, but you have my support.”¹¹

The danger at this juncture was that there might be too many constraints from Ottawa and Kabul over the use of force, which would seriously attenuate the vital operations designed to dig the insurgents out of Zharey and Panjwayi districts. This was not the same enemy who fought the coalition back in 2005 and it was becoming clear that they might not even be the same enemy who had mounted the spring 2006 operations. Regional Command (South) had to take time and build the intelligence picture as part of the process of educating its new coalition headquarters in Kabul as well as NDHQ in Ottawa. Maj Gen Freakley, who was now the DComd of ISAF, supported them on the Kabul front; he now accepted, after the First and Second Battles of Pashmul, that there was a serious problem west of the city.¹² Similarly, Regional Command (South) had to demonstrate to ISAF HQ that what they were about to do fit within the parameters of the ISAF ADZ strategy and ensure that effects mitigation and reconstruction were part of the plan. That would also take time.

Further pressures involved “the highest political levels in Afghanistan” and this specifically referred to the demands by the Karzai government that Highway 1 be kept open. The number of ambushes on that route went up dramatically after 3 August 2006 and the Ministry of Defence instructed the Afghan National Army to do everything it could to keep the corridor open. Of course, Regional Command (South) was inextricably linked to any activity on Highway 1 so these considerations became part of the planning process.¹³

Concurrent with these moves, elements in ISAF HQ started to view the upcoming operation as a strategic information operations opportunity. This differed from the Regional Command (South) view that saw the plan as an opportunity to have operational effects on the Kandahar power brokers and save the city. For some, MEDUSA presented itself as a means to demonstrate NATO’s will on an international stage.¹⁴

A key issue at Regional Command (South) was determining exactly what enemy they were up against. The problematic intelligence architecture did not help. A new ASIC led by Maj Dominic Goulet, arrived on the ground in early August 2006. Some of the newcomers in the ASIC viewed the information on the enemy’s dispositions in Zharey district, collected by Maj Nick Grimshaw’s B Company, Maj Harjit Sajjan, the PRT, and by now, their substantial Afghan contacts in the communities, with some skepticism. One Afghan source with military experience passed on that enemy bunkers under construction in Zharey were built with enough overhead cover to withstand 500-pound bombs and he recommended that NATO use 1 000-pound bombs but such reports did not always traverse the intelligence-planning system, nor was proffered Afghan advice usually taken. The ASIC commander later complained that advice provided to

the Regional Command (South) commander by his organization was not used as much as unvetted non-ASIC sources.¹⁵

Through his sources Maj Sajjan believed that there was a command and control node at Sperwan Ghar in Panjwayi; Zangabad was a weapons dump; there was a logistics route that led from Sperwan Ghar to Zangabad and Talukan, and across the river into Zharey; and the Gundy Ghar feature was another command and control node. There was also a medical node in Siah Choy, Zharey district. Enemy reinforcements coming in from Pakistan used Gundy Ghar and Sperwan Ghar as navigation, orientation and collection points before they were sent forward to the fighting.¹⁶

What was less clear were the enemy dispositions in eastern Zharey district. What were the locations of prominent enemy commanders? Who were they? What were the specific operating procedures of the forces based there? Regional Command (South) wanted to conduct a series of shaping operations to further define the target – in other words, manoeuvre-to-collect operations, and wanted more ISTAR resources, UAVs and SIGINT specifically, so that manoeuvring forces would have over-watch to see how the enemy reacted. However, the fact that Regional Command (South) was now a NATO headquarters meant that it did not have the same level of access to American intelligence systems CTF Aegis had when it worked for the American headquarters, CJTF-76. The American National Command Element commander at KAF, Col Steve Williams, and his staff acted as crucial and sometimes informal links during this period to make up for some of these deficiencies, and Maj Gen Freakley also assisted in this area. Regional Command (South) was not always a priority for these systems. Notably, the oft-maligned Canadian TUAVs remained important contributors to the ISTAR plan.

By this time, BGen Fraser and Lt Col Peter Connolly, one of his Australian operations officers, had also developed close relations with Lt Col Don Bolduc, the American commander of Special Operations TF 31. In order to more clearly define enemy dispositions in Panjwayi district, Lt Col Bolduc agreed to deploy part of TF 31 in a sweeping manoeuvre-to-collect operation into the Registan Desert and then into southern Panjwayi district. Once it got there, TF 31 working with part of 2nd Kandak, 1-205 Brigade would recce several areas of interest for Taliban presence in places that would become familiar to Canadian Army units over the next five years: Talukan, Mushan, Sperwan Ghar, and up to Ma'Sum Ghar.¹⁷

The other key relationship was between Fraser and Maj Gen Freakley. Fraser said, "I need help. What can you give me?" Freakley, as the senior American commander of 10th Mountain Division, was able to cut an infantry company and a pair of 105mm guns to augment Bolduc's TF 31, and facilitated the efforts of the American NCE led by Col Steve Williams. At the same time, conversations between Fraser and the British Director of Special Forces resulted in the redeployment of part of TF 42 to handle observation and interdiction tasks in the Reg Desert.¹⁸

Lt Gen Richards and Maj Gen Rahmatullah Raufi put pressure on Bismillah Khan in Kabul to deploy whatever he could to Kandahar. Afghan National Army support arrived in the form of two kandaks' worth of company groups from other Afghan regional commands in the north. These were distributed by Maj Gen Raufi to cover key population centres, specifically Bazaar-e Panjwayi. TF 31 was augmented with an Afghan company as well.¹⁹

Another key aspect of MEDUSA planning was the role of the PRT, led by LCol Simon Hetherington. An operation like MEDUSA would generate substantial infrastructure damage. Effects had to be mitigated. In time the PRT's role increased, but the problem, as usual, was the lack of money. The PRT worked hard to leverage reconstruction funds from international sources as there were virtually no Canadian funding sources available and CIDA was hesitant to participate. Colonel Williams from the American NCE, however, had access to substantial Commanders Emergency Response Programme monies. The combination of LCol Hetherington's connections and this money would prove to be an important factor later on during the operation.²⁰ Germany also kicked in several million euros.²¹

Task Force 3-06 Arrives

LCol Omer Lavoie took command of 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment in summer 2005, he knew he was taking his battalion to Afghanistan. From that point on, he focused his battalion's training on traditional counterinsurgency methods and dismounted patrolling while keeping a close eye on developments as the PRT and TF Gun Devils coped with the Kandahar Taliban. Structurally, TF 3-06 was a mirror of TF Orion as it made its preparations: three infantry companies, a battery of four M-777 guns from E Battery, an engineer squadron (23 Field Squadron), and recce troops from the RCD. The planners understood that the PRT would come under command of the battle group and assigned B Company to it as the force protection company. Conceptually, the TF 3-06 that arrived in Kandahar in August 2006 was based on 2005 thinking that was in turn aligned with the original CTF Aegis campaign plan.²²

Despite several visits to TF Orion in spring 2006 to gain better information on the changing situation, it was still a shock when a Taliban 82mm mortar round landed nearly on LCol Lavoie's LAV III during a recce in Panjwayi district with LCol Ian Hope just prior to the transfer of command authority between the commanders. With three wounded in his vehicle including his gunner, LCol Lavoie determined that his first move once he took over would be to occupy that piece of high ground across the river south of Pashmul and take out the enemy's indirect fire capability. This was not shaping up to be the counterinsurgency fight that TF 3-06 had planned or was structured for. Indeed, Patrol Base Wilson was mortared for three nights in a row during the handover, forcing troops to sleep in their vehicles.²³

TF 3-06's dispositions on the ground also mirrored those of TF Orion. LCol Lavoie, like LCol Hope, was responsible for FOB Martello in Shah Wali Kot, operations in Spin Boldak on the border, and PRT operations in the province. B Company, under Maj Geoff Abthorpe, was assigned to the PRT but for all intents and purposes, he became responsible for FOB Martello. C or "Charles" Company, commanded by Maj Matthew Sprague, was supposed to move to Spin Boldak but this was put on hold and part of ISTAR Squadron deployed instead. A Company from 2 PPCLI, commanded by Maj Mike Wright, was to go to that piece of high ground near Bazaar-e Panjwayi across from Pashmul and start patrolling. E Battery, commanded by Maj Greg Ivey, took over Maj Steve Gallagher's four M-777s. LCol Lavoie made changes to the recce organization and established an ISTAR Squadron under Maj Andrew Lussier. This included a recce troop of Coyotes from the RCD, Recce Platoon from 1 RCR, and the 1 RCR snipers. As for the engineers, Maj Mark Gasparotto commanded 23 Field Squadron. He had two field troops (with the LAV IIIs crewed by RCD armoured soldiers), a heavy equipment troop, and three EOD teams, two of which were heavy (Bisons and robots) and one that was airmobile.²⁴ The electronic warfare and TUAV organizations continued on as before. (See Figure 11-3)

Unfortunately, the state of TF 3-06's equipment, particularly the LAV IIIs, left much to be desired. They had already been to hell and back by this point in 2006. The decision to truncate LCol John Conrad's NSE numbers and capability back in 2005 meant that the NSE lacked the capacity to sustain and maintain the vehicle fleet after six months of constant operations all over southern Afghanistan. The NSE itself was worn out. The vehicle off road rate was approaching 80% in August but beefing up the NSE with "technical assistance visits" to bypass the bureaucratically mandated troop ceiling only took the organization so far.²⁵

A major deficiency was the continued use of the vulnerable G Wagons as ECM vehicles. The RG-31 fleet was having severe problems with their alternators so the G Wagons carried on in this role. 23 Field Squadron's heavy equipment was extremely problematic. None of it had been used during the TF Orion days because of the nature of their operations. Indeed, most of the vehicles had been in Bosnia or Kosovo, then Kabul, and then Kandahar, but were unserviceable. There was no gap crossing equipment: it had to be fabricated at KAF. None of the bulldozers worked, so an unused British D-6 was "scrounged" from a lot at KAF for the time being.²⁶ Canada still had no route clearance package similar to the American system to take on the IEDs.

Then there was the matter of ammunition. During the handover to TF 3-06, LCol Lavoie found that there were only 300 rounds of 155mm high-explosive ammunition in-theatre, when in his view there should have been a minimum of 3 000 rounds with a resupply of 500 a day. This went to BGen Fraser and down to LCol Conrad who confirmed the shortage.

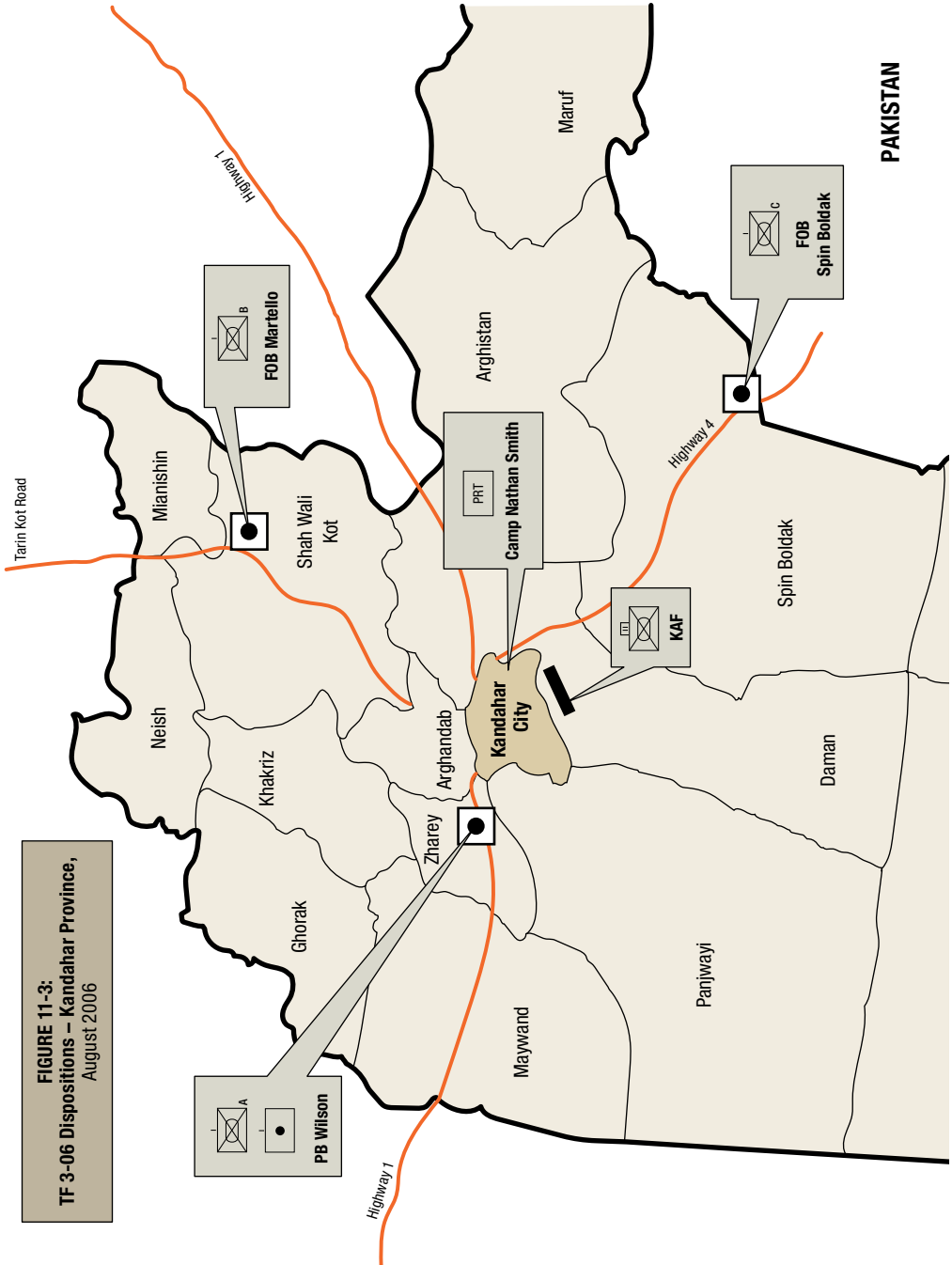


FIGURE 11-3:
TF 3-06 Dispositions – Kandahar Province,
August 2006

Figure 11-3: TF 3-06 Dispositions – Kandahar Province, August 2006

The July usage had not been replenished partly because LCol Conrad was personally overwhelmed, partly because of the decision to cut personnel positions, and partly because of the unfamiliarity with handling wartime consumption rates. This was a legacy of the UN 'peacekeeping' era, when artillery batteries deployed to the Balkans but rarely fired.²⁷

When the request for more ammunition reached Kabul, a Canadian air force general became upset because the ammunition requirements were going to "put a significant drain on 'his' air lift." A phone call from Kabul demanded justification as the "previous battle group fired 600 rounds, why do you need so much?" The air movement people were eventually convinced of the requirements and set out to build up stocks as quickly as possible.²⁸

Then there was the heat. TF 3-06's personnel arrived in the first weeks of August 2006, when the average temperature was between 50-60 degrees Celsius. Expecting troops to get off the C-130 Hercules and conduct operations, especially when loaded with body armour and ammunition, was clearly unrealistic. Acclimatization under such conditions was mandatory. The rotation plan reflected a bureaucratic approach based on the UN 'peacekeeping' era. The operational tempo and climatic conditions of Afghanistan were clearly not a factor for Ottawa planners who were still caught in the Balkans paradigm and on a Balkans schedule of rotating every six months. The enemy, on the other hand, had substantial time to acclimatize and were already in place.

The Battle of Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 August 2006²⁹

During a familiarization tour with LCol Hope on 15 August, LCol Lavoie's LAV III was nearly struck by an enemy mortar round, and the subsequent blast wounded his gunner. As a result, Lavoie ordered A Company to take control of the Ma'Sum Ghar feature and locate where the mortar rounds were being fired from.³⁰

Maj Wright's A Company received the handover from Maj Grimshaw and B Company on 14 August at Patrol Base Wilson. Zharey district south of the first wadi line was a 'no-go' area and this was supported with Maj Sajjan's information, which Maj Wright considered "by far the best int[elligence] product we had. I carried that trace the whole tour."³¹ On 19 August, Capt Massoud's Standby Police Unit 005, occupying Bazaar-e Panjwayi with an Afghan National Army company, received fire and reported that the enemy were going to try and take the Panjwayi district centre. Lavoie ordered Wright to respond. Keeping 1 Platoon to secure Patrol Base Wilson and 2 Platoon to act as a QRF for Highway 1, 3 Platoon, a forward observation officer from E Battery, and A Company headquarters deployed east back down Highway 1 to the Route Fosters' junction and then west. (See Figure 11-4)

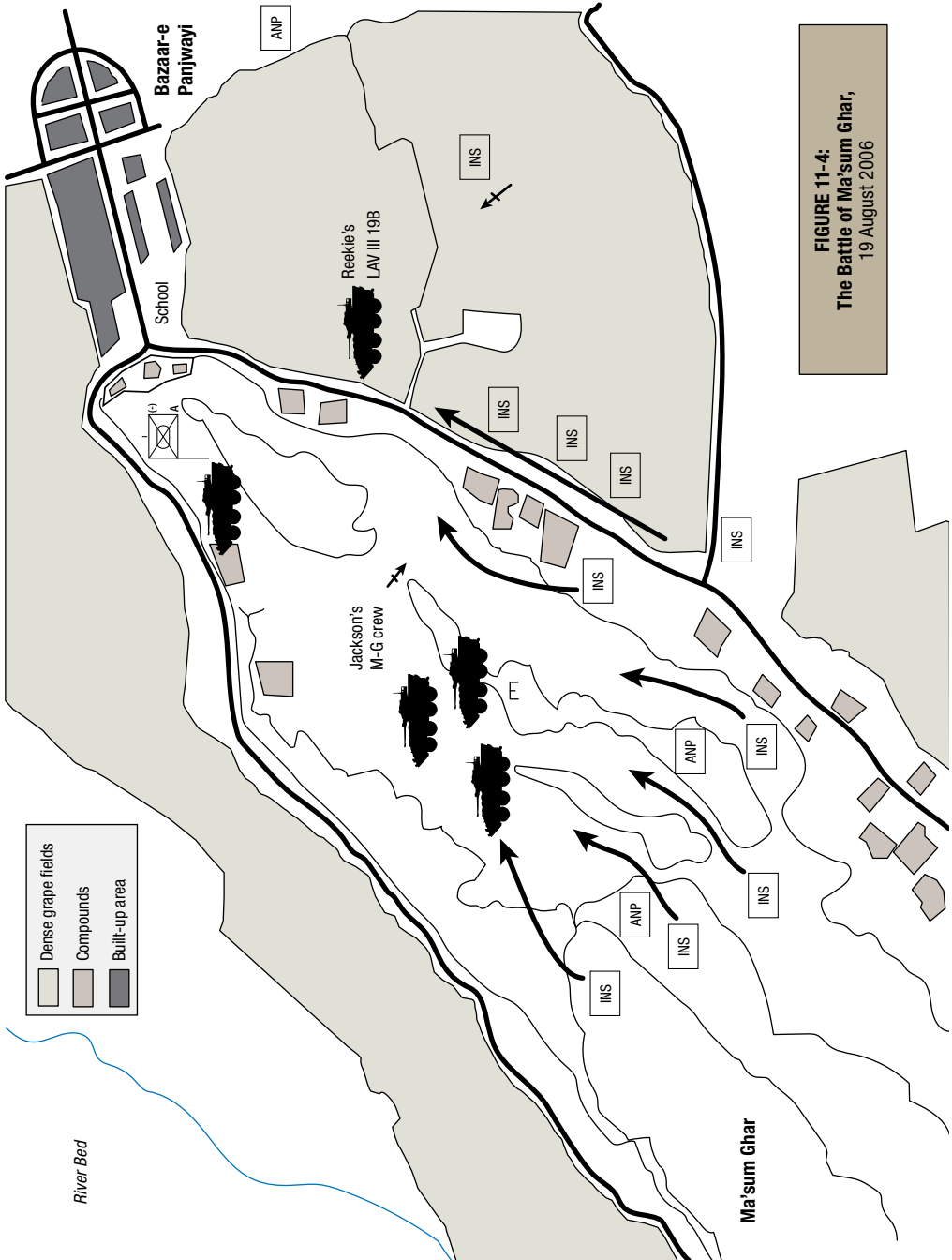


FIGURE 11-4:
The Battle of Ma'Sum Ghar,
19 August 2006

Figure 11-4: The Battle of Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 August 2006

On arrival in Bazaar-e Panjwayi, the troops noted that the whole place was shuttered and the only people on the streets were the police. Moving to the Ma'Sum Ghar feature that overlooked both districts, Maj Wright saw that the police unit was focused north on Pashmul but that no one was looking south and southeast of the Ghar. He put two sections and the forward observation officer in positions just north and below the police positions on the hill, and put the third section facing south. Capt Mike Reekie was sent down to Route Fosters below this position in his LAV III. At 1845 hours, machine gun fire from the grape fields south of Ma'Sum Ghar erupted. Inside the Ma'Sum Ghar bowl, the 'police' positions started firing an RPG at A Company's LAVs; the Taliban had infiltrated the position and taken out two observation positions between A Company's sections.

As night fell, WO Mike Jackson and one of the sections worked their way to a 'saddle' in the Ghar overlooking the south. Once they moved up, they engaged several waves of insurgents working their way north through the fields and across Route Fosters, looking to join the fight. During this action, the section accounted for an estimated 40 enemy casualties.³²

Maj Wright's communications with LCol Lavoie nearly broke down and he had to relay everything through Patrol Base Wilson. Lavoie asked if Wright needed to be reinforced: Wright declined, explaining that the situation was too confused on the ground and there would be too much risk of a 'blue on blue.' AH-64s, TUAV and Predator were on the way. It was still difficult for Wright to discern where the enemy were firing from and at this point, Capt Massoud withdrew his police.

Capt Mike Reekie and his crew, on the other hand, were moving forward, looking for a position to put their vehicle, but the terrain was too flat. He finally found a fold in the ground, but then realized they were nearly 400 metres away from Ma'Sum Ghar. This move may have forced the enemy to prematurely commit the fighters he had in the area. Capt Reekie's vehicle engaged several waves of enemy who were organized in 10-man sections, with each section containing a PKM machine gun and an RPG. They appeared drugged as they walked into certain death. The LAV driver, Cpl Chad Chevrefils, used night vision goggles from his position to identify targets for Capt Reekie and his gunner, Sgt Dan Holley. By the time they had to withdraw, this crew operating a single vehicle, with no air or artillery support, had killed an estimated 30 to 45 insurgents as they emerged in groups of five from the compounds in the area.³³ Reekie's entire LAV crew was decorated for this action. Reekie and Chevrefils both received the Medal of Military Valour while Holley, Cpl Nigel Gregg, and Pte Tim Wilkins were Mentioned in Dispatches.

Running low on ammunition, Maj Wright planned to withdraw, link up with 2 Platoon on Route Fosters, conduct a combat resupply, and come back into the fight. On withdrawal, however, two G Wagons would not start and had to be towed. At one point during the course of the action, WO Michael Jackson and MCpl Paul Munroe were forced to conduct a fighting

withdrawal. They both worked under fire to extract stricken vehicles and eventually regrouped their men to continue the fight. Jackson and Munroe were later awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.

As 2 Platoon roared into the desert leaguer and passed off all the ammo it could find, 3 Platoon launched back down the highway. A Predator orbiting overhead identified an enemy ambush party at the gas station and dispatched them with a Hellfire missile. Another ambush party that infiltrated from the north tried to engage 3 Platoon on Fosters but the LAV IIIs shot their way out of it. Maj Wright wanted to link up with the Afghan National Army positions north of the district centre and plotted a route on a black track that bypassed the town. A LAV III bogged down, which forced a halt. Then 2 Platoon, back at its positions on Fosters, observed an enemy RPG team and section south of the road – and engaged them. Intelligence reports flowed in that a company-sized enemy force was infiltrating through Badvan Ghar from Zharey district while a high volume of fire was directed at the Afghan National Army positions in the Panjwayi district centre.



Photo Credit: Author

The Ma'Sum Ghar feature as seen from 'One Tank Hill' to the north east in June 2006, many months before the forward operating base was constructed. The enemy engaged A Company, 2 PPCLI and Afghan forces on the night of 19 August 2006 as the Taliban infiltrated the feature from the west.

Maj Wright was again concerned about the possibility of a ‘blue on blue’ and requested permission at 0300 to re-group and wait for better control measures. The Afghan police reported multiple wounded and asked for an escort back down Fosters to Kandahar City. Unusually, the insurgents left many of their dead behind. The remains of some 37 insurgents were recovered in and around Ma’Sum Ghar and Bazaar-e Panjwayi, most of them fragmented by 25mm fire. An estimate, based on a variety of sources, suggests that the enemy lost 75 to 100 personnel that night, with an even larger number of wounded.³⁴



Photo Credit: Author

This is the southern face of the Ma’Sum Ghar feature taken from the communities south of Bazaar-e Panjwayi. On 17 August 2006, elements of A Company 2 PPCLI defeated an insurgent thrust from the left directed at taking the feature and the town. One LAV III crew on the road and a machine gun position below the saddle inflicted an estimated 75 enemy killed and thwarted the attack.

Bazaar-e Panjwayi, the Panjwayi district centre and Ma’Sum Ghar remained in coalition hands. Wright and Lavoie agreed that a permanent position needed to be established at Ma’Sum Ghar as it was going to be key terrain for any future actions in the area. The next night, A Company endured a sustained ambush, a 10-kilometre gauntlet of fire from Patrol Base Wilson, through Asheque, Senjaray and to the bridge over the Arghandab on the outskirts of Kandahar City. The ever-innovative enemy lit fires along one side of the road in order to silhouette the Canadian vehicles for their RPG gunners. The insurgent commanders considered it as a payback over their losses of 19 August. Lavoie noted that “It became apparent to me that there was clearly more than 50 Taliban in this area...they’ve clearly indicated they have the resolve to fight and they’re fighting in [a] conventional sense, head to head.”³⁵

Plans, Mid to Late August 2006

Regional Command (South)'s warning order, coinciding with the transfer of command authority from TF Orion to TF 3-06 and the events of 19 August, instructed ISAF forces in all four provinces to set conditions for the establishment of four ADZs: Lashkar Gah, Tarinkot, Kandahar City and Qalat. "Task Force Kandahar," that is, TF 3-06, had additional tasks. These were: to support Afghan National Army operations to secure Highway 1; to conduct operations to generate intelligence without becoming decisively engaged; and to extract or support SOF operations as required. The Canadian battle group was to "conduct task force level feints to convince the enemy of a battle group assault on his southern flank" that is, Pashmul in Zharey district. The battle group was to be prepared to "exploit into Pashmul" and to "clear enemy positions in Pashmul and west."³⁶ (See Figure 11-5)

This was LCol Lavoie's introduction to Operation MEDUSA. By 25 August 2006, the TF 3-06 operations staff led by Maj Jay Harvey had examined several courses of action and issued its warning order to the task force. TF 3-06's concept of operations was to:

...deceive the enemy into believing that a major assault on their C2 and CSS nodes is imminent by advancing with purpose from the EAST to WEST on two separate axis. I will achieve this by using two balanced Company Group teams one team north along Highway 1 and one team south utilizing primarily Route Fosters. Once the Taliban understand that their critical vulnerabilities are under attack from a major ground force and they mass to defend themselves, higher Brigade assets will destroy their operational capability using precision fire from Close Air Support, Aviation, and Artillery. If an opportunity to exploit further into PASHMUL arises, the battle group will continue to secure ground and claim not only physical victory but it will also be an I/O defeat for the Taliban.³⁷

B Company, meanwhile, had just settled in to FOB Martello. Maj Geoff Abthorpe had already established an aggressive patrol plan, pushing out three and four patrols a day, when the mortars and rockets started. Probes of the forward operating base's perimeter followed these harassing attacks. On one occasion, the Afghan National Army artillery detachment started to take out insurgents with direct fire from its D-30 guns. Reduced to two platoons and a field troop of engineers,³⁸ B Company discovered that all was not well in Shah Wali Kot district but the problem was not just insurgents. A heavily armed gang was intercepting truck traffic on the Tarinkot road. This team of six was killed in a gunfight during a joint Canadian/ANSF patrol, but the mortar team continued to plague FOB Martello.³⁹

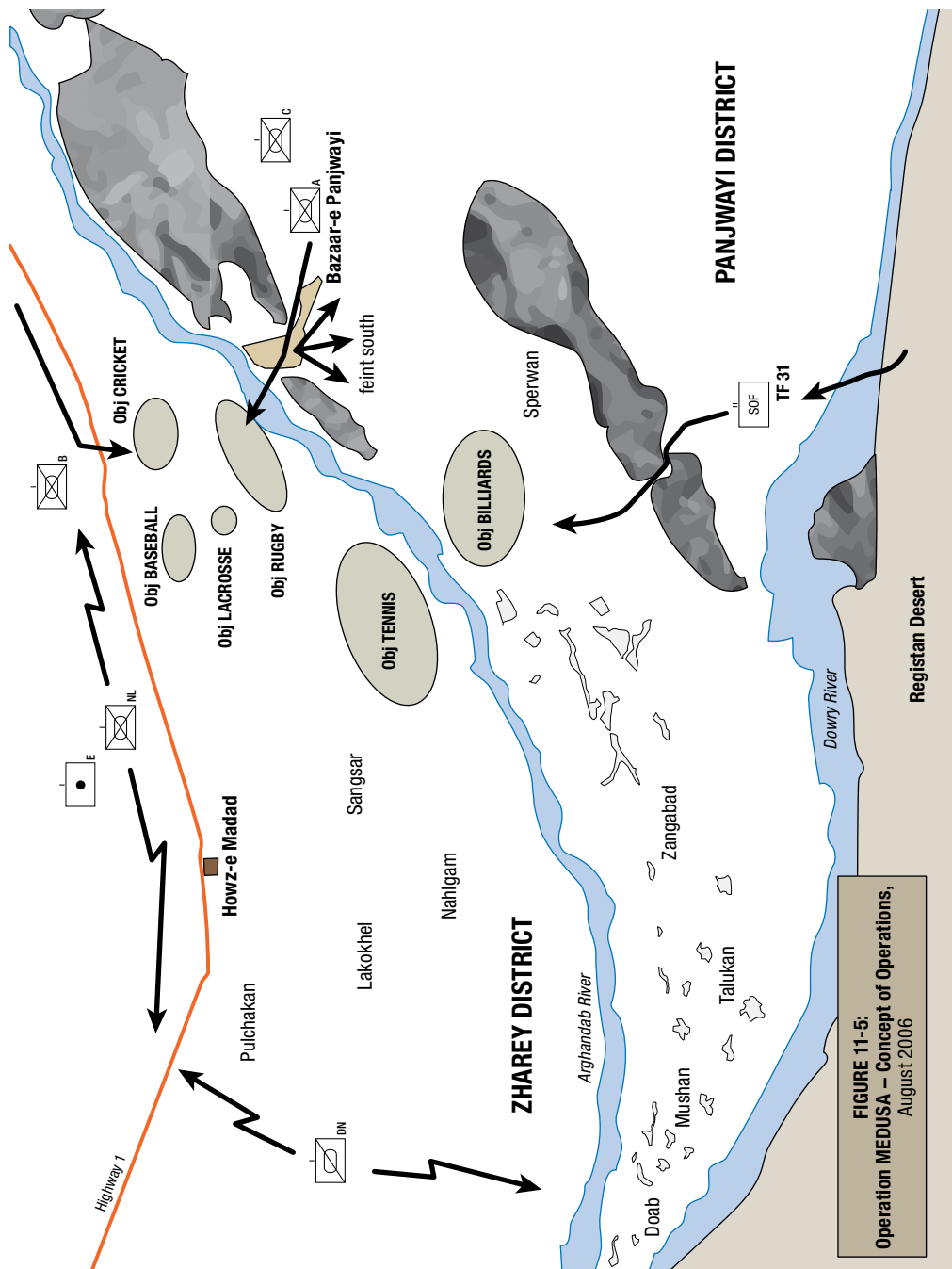


Figure 11-5: Operation MEDUSA – Concept of Operations, August 2006

Fraser also decided to flush out western Panjwayi district after the battle of Ma'Sum Ghar and eliminate the shadow government in the area.⁴⁰ Lt Col Bolduc's special operations TF 31, with Capt Derek Prohar along as the Aegis SOF liaison officer, moved from KAF into the Reg Desert on 26 August. In the desert wastes, TF 31 engaged infiltrating Taliban fighters on numerous occasions, intercepted Pakistan Army personnel driving trucks containing hidden spaces loaded with ammunition and weapons, and even stumbled across a Taliban training camp. This was further evidence of a substantial build-up and support network backstopping the enemy forces west of Kandahar City. By 31 August, TF 31 made 'land-fall' in southern Panjwayi district and continued to manoeuvre-to-collect.⁴¹

The TF 3-06 Tactical Operations Centre became a focal point for Sperwer TUAV-cued engagements. Pioneered by TF Orion, the use of TUAV or MQ-1 Predator to spot for close air support, artillery or armed Predator was expanded by TF 3-06. In late August 2006, the focus of these operations turned to several probable Taliban staging areas along Highway 1. The first mission on 22 August involved the discovery of 45 insurgents receiving orders. Since there were no weapons identified, the strike package was waved off. Then the enemy broke into three groups and moved to fighting positions on Highway 1. One group of 15 took up fighting positions near the road, while another moved to a flank likely to be used by coalition forces, with the third group of 15 positioned in reserve. The enemy continued to train on the ground that they would fight on but without weapons.⁴²

TF 3-06 started taking casualties. On 22 August, a suicide bomber attacked Camp Nathan Smith, killing Cpl David Braun from 2 PPCLI and wounding three other Canadians. LCol Lavoie wanted to send a message and get some payback, so he instructed A Company to conduct a patrol down Highway 1. The M-777s, Harriers and Predators were "locked on" waiting for ambush teams to emerge, which they did: some 40 to 50 fighters were identified armed to the teeth. Unfortunately, the enemy commander deployed them along the road so they were spread out in a line. Maj Greg Ivey suggested dropping a couple of artillery rounds nearby in order to force them into cover and concentrate. 30 insurgents ran for a single compound while the others dispersed. An RAF Harrier came in and leveled the compound with 500-pound bombs, killing 29 insurgents. After that, ambushes on Highway 1 dropped off.⁴³

The formal operations order for MEDUSA came down from Regional Command (South) on 27 August. The intelligence appreciation noted that there was increased movement of enemy high-value target leadership and Al Qaeda trainers into Zharey, plus a mix of HiG and out-of-area fighters. Estimates of enemy forces suggested that there were 200 local fighters and 200 to 300 fighters from elsewhere. They were entrenched under reinforced defensive positions, and had demonstrated that they could conduct fire and movement

through their daily ambushes on Highway 1. TF 3-06's mission was to defeat Taliban forces in Pashmul to set the conditions for a Kandahar ADZ. This was to be done by establishing freedom of movement on Highway 1 and the security of Kandahar City. The plan had four phases and two sub-phases. Phase 1 involved shaping operations. Operations conducted by TF 3-06 starting on 15 August were deemed to be part of this effort, especially manoeuvre-to-collect. The task force was deemed already involved in Phase 1: defining the enemy dispositions, and destroying targets of opportunity. A Danish recce company working in western Zharey, British SOF operating to the southwest, and American SOF to the south would support these efforts.⁴⁴ (See Figure 11-6)

Phase 2 or Decisive Operations, was specifically designed to defeat the enemy in the vicinity of Pashmul. Phase 2 had two different sub-phases. Phase 2A, or "Strike," was a feint with TF 3-06 simulating an assault on Objectives RUGBY (Pashmul) and CRICKET. The plan stressed that TF 3-06 was not to get decisively engaged. Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems would observe when the enemy concentrated their command and control and other resources, and then a 24-hour bombardment would take place. Phase 2B or the "Link Up", saw the deliberate clearance of Objectives RUGBY, CRICKET and LACROSSE by TF 3-06, and then clearance east to Route Comox. This would secure Pashmul and set the conditions for the establishment of governance by the Afghans. Phase 3 envisioned moving the forces to the 25 easting. Phase 4, or "Stabilization", had an Afghan National Army kandak secure the area to facilitate resettlement. Quick Impact Projects would bridge the gap until PRT-assisted development took hold. There was no mention of a role for the police, nor was there any detail on exactly who or how the area would be governed and protected.⁴⁵

The plan to handle 'effects mitigation' in Zharey district involved LCol Hetherington and the PRT. The flow of displaced persons from the district into the city attracted the attention of the Disaster Management Committee, led by Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri. The UN organizations in Kandahar City worked with the committee, which also had a liaison officer from the PRT. The concept that the Afghans would take the lead through existing organizations predominated as the Community Development Councils and the Provincial Development Committee were to play a significant enabling role with ad hoc Disaster Management Committee teams from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, by contacting the Community Development Council members, and coordinating assistance locally. Various Canadian and American military aid monies were on tap to feed any reconstruction: Commanders Contingency Fund and Commanders Emergency Response Programme, specifically.⁴⁶

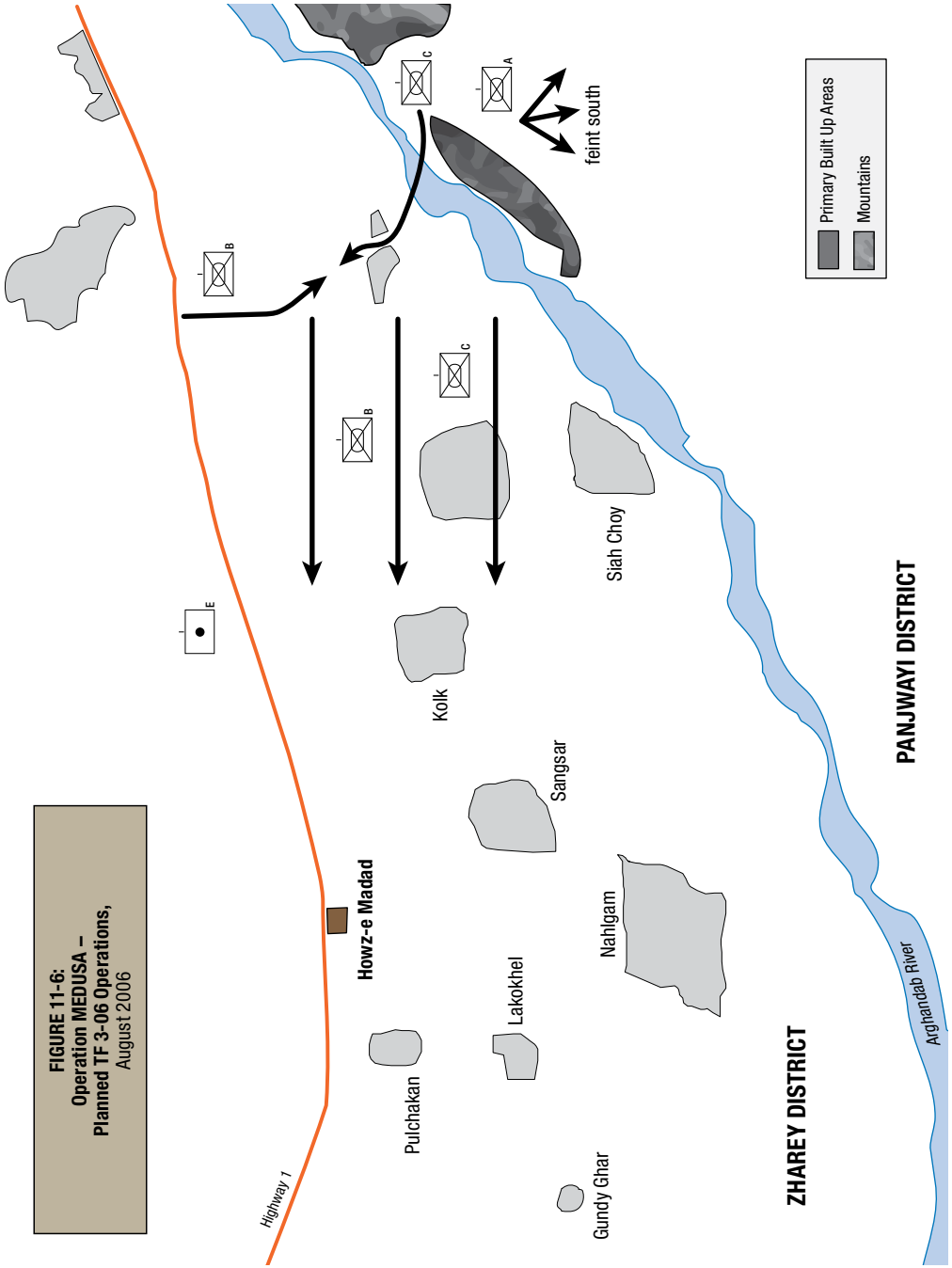


Figure 11-6: Operation MEDUSA – Planned TF 3-06 Operations, August 2006

TF 3-06 had to reposition for MEDUSA, which caused the same problems that TF Orion had when it deployed to Helmand province back in July 2006. The forward operating bases in Shah Wali Kot and in Spin Boldak needed to be protected while their infantry companies moved to Panjwayi and Zharey. The decision was made by Regional Command (South) to send elements of the RAF Regiment guarding KAF down to Spin Boldak to work with security contractors, while arrangements were made for a Dutch para company to occupy FOB Martello. Some Canadian combat engineers from 23 Field Squadron would remain at Martello. These moves took place on 25 and 28 August respectively.⁴⁷

By this time, TF 31 had manoeuvred into southern Panjwayi district after an aerial resupply by MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft. One of the first insurgent installations they uncovered was a satellite communications system and a medical facility co-located in a merchant's shop. They also developed information that a top Taliban commander, Hafiz Majid, was nearby. The special forces troops discovered an enemy leadership order of battle, plus the methodology on how they communicated. The local population confirmed that "The Arabs," that is, Al Qaeda, were back in the country alongside the Taliban. SIGINT confirmed that there were 16 separate insurgent commanders in southern and western Panjwayi district. Usually a commander had 50 fighters under his control. This meant that the initial TF 31 intelligence estimate of 300 or 400 fighters in the district was, in the words of special operator Maj Rusty Bradley, "Wrong. Way wrong." It was at least twice that.⁴⁸ The insurgents then attacked TF 31 in a coordinated fashion, which forced the special operators to employ AC-130 gunships: "the death plane" as the Taliban called it. Maj Bradley noted that coordinated enemy action was "something that I'd never witnessed before in my three rotations to Afghanistan."⁴⁹ The implication of this was that TF 3-06 was about to attack what they thought was an estimated 500 fighters in Zharey district, but that there were possibly 800, 1000, or even more fighters in Panjwayi district to their southwest.

On 29 August 2006, Regional Command (South) issued minor changes to the MEDUSA operations order and scheduled a rehearsal of concept for the 30th. The changes included the addition of American counter-IED route clearance packages from Zabul; two Dutch PzH 2000 self-propelled guns; and the addition of A Company, 2-4th Infantry as Brigade Reserve.

Unusually, ISAF's entire senior leadership arrived at KAF for a briefing on the upcoming operation. This included Lt Gen Richards and Maj Gen Freakley; even LGen Mike Gauthier, Commander CEFCOM, showed up. BGen Fraser was on leave at this point. LCol Lavoie gave the briefing: "I walked Lt Gen Richards through the concept of operations and the scheme of manoeuvre and I always remember the last two things he said, 'Omer, if you fail, NATO fails. I'll see you on the Arghandab for tea in a month.'"⁵⁰

On to MEDUSA...1-4 September 2006

On 1 September, Governor Asadullah Khalid announced publicly that there were going to be offensive operations in Zharey and Panjwayi districts and that the population should evacuate. This message was supported with ISAF leaflet drops throughout the area. The displaced persons flow significantly increased over the next day as columns of people moved out of the area.⁵¹ B Company redeployed from FOB Martello to Patrol Base Wilson, while Charles Company moved into Bazaar-e Panjwayi. A Company moved to Bazaar-e Panjwayi as well. As they understood it, the infantry companies would take up positions for 72 hours and observe pattern of life, and then engage targets of opportunity if they presented themselves.⁵² By this time, 23 Field Squadron had shaken out. Scrounged heavy equipment, which included a British bulldozer, an Afghan National Army bulldozer, and a rented civilian bulldozer, were expediently up-armoured or “Mad Maxed” with armour plating welded on. The wheeled Zettelmeyer earthmover and the backhoe were also “Mad Maxed.”⁵³

The whole operation, weeks in the making, cocked and ready to go, was suddenly interrupted on 2 September. Capt Steve MacBeth from Recce Platoon saw a “fireball in the sky” and what “looked like a transport plane” go down near the Chalghowr-Salavat area in eastern Panjwayi district. All TF 3-06 air assets including surveillance, close air support, and helicopters were re-tasked. An airliner-sized RAF Nimrod MR2 surveillance aircraft suffered a fuel leak followed by a catastrophic explosion. This particular Nimrod was equipped with a Wescam MX-15 surveillance system and had been used to support TF 42, the British SOF task force in its operations in Kandahar City. U.S. Air Force Pararescue Jumpers were overhead in their HH-60s but would not land until ground forces had secured the site. ISTAR Squadron, led by Maj Lussier, was in Waiting Area A on Route Fosters east of Bazaar-e Panjwayi champing at the bit when they watched the Nimrod crash to the east near Chalghowr. ISTAR Squadron was immediately deployed to the crash site and established itself in a ‘starburst’ position so that it could be secured. Priority recovery items included the black box, crew DNA, computers, and any pieces of classified paper that were scattered in the area. Recce Platoon swept around the site, picking up body parts, a “fairly ghastly job” according to Capt Macbeth, who led that effort. It wasn’t until nearly a day after the assault had gone into Pashmul on 3 September that ISTAR Squadron, with its surveillance Coyotes and Recce Platoon, was relieved by the RAF Regiment at the crash site.⁵⁴

B Company feinted down Highway 1, while A Company moved down Route Fosters east. Charles Company, 23 Field Squadron, and sniper detachments moved onto Ma’Sum Ghar across the river from Pashmul and B Company took up its positions along Highway 1. A Canadian special operations combat control team with linkages to American SOF air and artillery assets infiltrated into a position high up on Ma’Sum Ghar.⁵⁵ (See Figure 11-7)

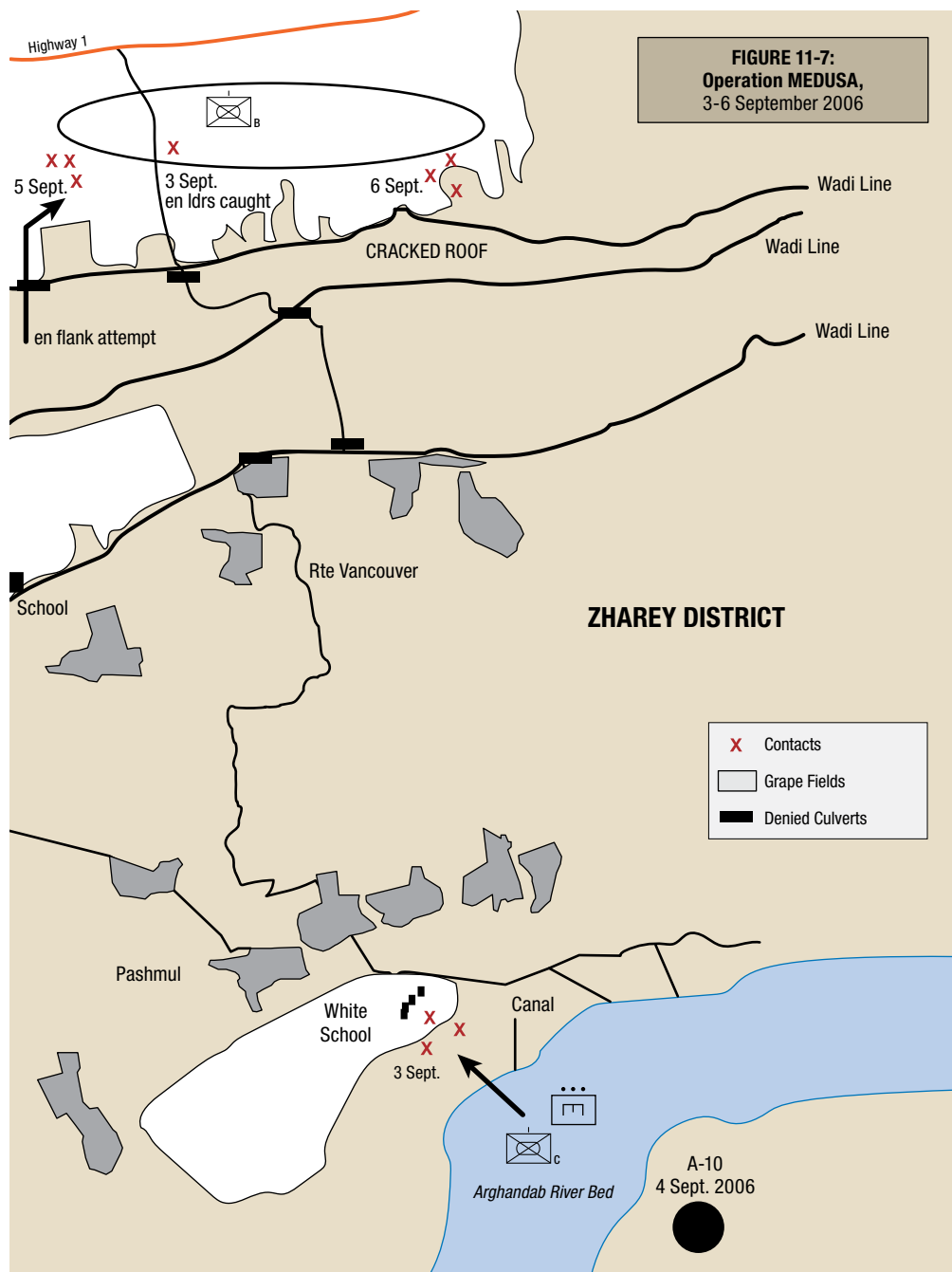


Figure 11-7: Operation MEDUSA, 3-4 September 2006

At 0615, Charles Company officer commanding Maj Sprague radioed that there was no civilian pattern of life across the river and he could see Taliban working on defensive positions. At 0630, E Battery opened up with its M-777 guns on some of its 19 pre-selected targets.⁵⁶ Combat engineers from 23 Field Squadron moved in to improve the southern approaches to the Arghandab river wadi, using their modified bulldozers to plough routes and used explosives to remove trees.⁵⁷ The idea that the feints would draw the enemy into their fighting positions so they could be pounded with artillery and air was not working. No massed enemy were observed so a planned B-1B strike with JDAMS was called off. By 1000 hours, fire discipline was imposed on E Battery due to the apparent lack of enemy response or targets. The sniper detachment at Ma'Sum Ghar, however, thought they saw the enemy using mirrors to signal each other and later observed and reported enemy movement.⁵⁸

Early in the afternoon of 2 September, BGen Fraser, back from an artificially shortened leave, was briefed on the situation. Two factors stood out. First, the intelligence picture suggested that the enemy were not occupying Pashmul in the numbers projected by initial estimates and second, the insurgents were not being drawn into concentrations where they could be taken out economically with fires. Fraser believed that more manoeuvre-to-collect followed by bombardment would reach diminishing returns. Related to that was the fact that the allied organizations temporarily deployed to Regional Command (South) for MEDUSA could only be held in place for a limited period, possibly only seven days, before they would have to redeploy for other tasks elsewhere.⁵⁹

Fraser then flew out to Bazaar-e Panjwayi. Meeting with LCol Lavoie, BGen Fraser told him, "Omer, I need you to go in now. Do you understand what I am asking?" This discussion turned into a heated argument between the two men. Lavoie said that he did not know where the enemy were, that it was nighttime, and that the IED threat was high. LCol Lavoie wanted another 48 hours to define where the enemy were located and bombard them. Fraser wanted the task force to cross the river and occupy Pashmul. Fraser returned to KAF, while Lavoie briefed Sprague and the rest of the sub-unit commanders.⁶⁰

At 1600 hours, the battle group received instructions from Regional Command (South) to move to Phase 2B of the plan at 0100 hours on 3 September. The battle group requested that the bombardment be continued.⁶¹ 7 Platoon, along with combat engineers, moved across the wadi to establish lanes but were withdrawn later in the evening.⁶²

BGen Fraser, on the other hand, was under substantial pressure from multiple sources to get on with the operation. According to his staff and other officers in higher headquarters, there was pressure conveyed through Maj Gen Freakley from Lt Gen Eikenberry and even CENTCOM because Operation MEDUSA was using so many American aerial surveillance, intelligence "enablers" and close air support assets, and these could not all be fixed in one place for protracted periods. For example, the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise was off the

coast of Pakistan and could only conduct air support with its 36 F-18s for a limited window because it had to move on to other tasks. MQ-1 Predators were needed in Iraq and Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan. Then there was pressure from ISAF HQ to get in a “win” for strategic information operations effect with the Afghans and the more reticent NATO allies. There was no higher-level Canadian pressure at this point.⁶³

At midnight, Fraser ordered Lavoie to accept a 0200 timing for crossing the river, but Maj Sprague then argued with LCol Lavoie over the hastiness of the operation and insisted that he needed more preparation time. There were several shouting matches over the secure radios between Bazaar-e Panjwayi and Regional Command (South) at KAF. The timing of the move shifted yet again from 0600 to 0700.⁶⁴

The DCO Maj Martin Lipscey, the Operations Officer Maj Jay Harvey and the TF 3-06 intelligence staff under Capt Chris Purdy expressed concerns among themselves that the battle group still did not have a clear picture of the enemy dispositions in Zharey. The TUAV sensors, for example, were unable to penetrate the heavy foliage in the Pashmul area. The water-laden marijuana plants were especially effective at concealing heat signatures.⁶⁵

Maj Lipscey was also unaware of Maj Sajjan’s HUMINT activities. Maj Sajjan was over at Patrol Base Wilson at this point, working to gain more information on the enemy picture in Zharey, when Maj Lipscey told him the battle group was going in at 0600 on 3 September and that the enemy were not in Pashmul anymore. Sajjan asked Lipscey who had made that assessment. “The int guys,” Lipscey replied. When he looked again, Sajjan believed that this was based in part on the assessment of a master corporal in the Mobile Electronic Warfare Team. The assessment did not correspond to information collected by HUMINT sources in the Zharey area. When he asked the Mobile Electronic Warfare Team to use their communications system to pass on his concerns, the crew blocked him from entering the vehicle and refused to pass on the information or his dissenting opinion. This occurred despite the fact that LCol Erik Gjos, the Regional Command (South) G-2, had been told by BGen Fraser that Sajjan had access to the intelligence architecture.⁶⁶ U.S. Special Operations TF 31 commentary noted later that “General Fraser’s intelligence about a weak, broken Taliban was wrong.”⁶⁷

It is possible that there was an over-reliance on technical systems in an attempt to gain intelligence on the enemy in Zharey district in the lead-up to 3 September 2006. Aerial systems were defeated by the dense foliage, covered streams and built-up areas.⁶⁸ SIGINT systems were defeated by the enemy’s uncharacteristic use of radio silence and more traditional signal methods. HUMINT was not profitably employed. TF 3-06’s ground recce capability, ISTAR Squadron, was tied up providing security to the Nimrod crash site, and, in any case, appeared to have been left out of the planning and used as a QRF. In theory, the Recce Platoon should have been conducting recce patrols on the periphery and even into the target area, while the

Coyote surveillance vehicles should have provided lateral observation to supplement aerial observation. The American information from higher-level assets and Canadian information at the tactical level, however, appeared to correlate: the enemy were no longer in Pashmul in the large numbers that earlier estimates suggested.

Charles Company, supported by 2 Troop and the heavy equipment from 23 Field Squadron, stepped off from Ma'Sum Ghar around 0630. B Company on the northern front feinted along Highway 1 and south toward the first wadi line code-named CRACKED ROOF near the Yellow School west of Pasab, trying to draw an enemy reaction. While 2 Troop uncovered an IED at the crossing point and disposed of it, E Battery opened up on suspected enemy positions around Objective RUGBY.⁶⁹ The crossing point for Charles Company was offset 200 to 300 metres to the west of the crossing point used by TF Orion on 3 August to avoid canalizing terrain.⁷⁰



Photo Credit: Author

This aerial shot of Zharey district shows Highway 1 heading west to Helmand and clearly depicts the first and second wadi lines encountered by both TF Orion and TF 3-06 during their assaults on the district from the north in 2006.

Charles Company splayed out from the breach with 7 Platoon to the left facing the White School, 8 Platoon centre and front, and 9 Platoon right. Capt Derek Wessan's 7 Platoon, with its three LAV IIIs and an ECM G Wagon, advanced toward the White School and

halted 50 to 100 metres away as the engineers cleared a lane; there were no IEDs or mines. The enemy opened up with a concentrated RPG attack on the ECM G Wagon destroying the vehicle and killing WO Frank Nolan. The entire area erupted with fire as the enemy then targeted the right-flanking LAV III. 7 Platoon returned fire with its 25mm cannons, while other LAV IIIs, including 23 Field Squadron vehicles in over-watch from as far back as Ma'Sum Ghar, sought out targets and engaged. One LAV III crew on the Ghar took out 12 insurgents by keeping its 25mm cannon aimed at a gap between two buildings that the enemy had to use to get into the fight. Then 7 Platoon's left-flank LAV III's 25mm cannon stopped firing after six rounds; the crew commander's headset wires had been pulled into the feed mechanism, jamming it. The enemy then concentrated fire on the LAV III as it backed up. Its crew used its coaxial machine gun in response. Then the vehicle bogged down. The crew abandoned it and moved to the casualty collection point, which was set up behind the Zettelmeyer earthmover.⁷¹

A LAV III from 2 Troop moved up to assist 7 Platoon with suppressive fire; an enemy 82mm recoilless rifle targeted it. The round penetrated the turret, killing Sgt Shane Stachnik and wounding his gunner. The vehicle was still mobile, however. Back at the site of Nolan's G Wagon, Sgt Scott Fawcett, Cpl Jason Funnell and Pte Michael O'Rourke dashed out of their LAV III to the heavily damaged vehicle. Working with Cpl Sean Teal, Fawcett provided suppressive fire while O'Rourke and Funnell moved the wounded from the G Wagon to their LAV III under heavy enemy fire. Cpl Teal was awarded the Star of Military Valour for his actions, while Sgt Fawcett, MCpl Niefer, Cpl Funnell and Pte O'Rourke received the Medal of Military Valour.

The other two platoons poured fire back at the insurgents from their positions opposite theirs while a high volume of machine gun and RPG fire descended on them from precisely the same positions encountered by TF Orion on 3 August to the north of the crossing site, behind the walled fields and tall grass at the crossroads. The snipers on Ma'Sum Ghar could see the enemy firing from loopholes in the walls.⁷² Special operations forces observers saw that the insurgents were forcing the few remaining civilians in the area out into the open at gunpoint "as shields against airstrikes."⁷³

To the north, B Company continued with its cordon mission, itching to get into the fight. Maj Abthorpe moved the company and feinted toward the south, then pulled back to the road, and then feinted in elsewhere. His tactical psychological operations team, manning a checkpoint, grabbed four local Taliban leaders as they were fleeing the area.⁷⁴

Back in Pashmul, an enemy recoilless rifle team manoeuvred and then engaged the Zettelmeyer earthmover and the casualty collection point with an SPG-9, killing WO Frank Mellish and Pte William Cushley and wounding eight personnel. To confuse matters further, an aircraft came in to provide close air support but dropped its bombs next

to Maj Sprague and his company command post, shaking things up. Another G Wagon, brought in to recover the ECM G Wagon, got stuck in a ditch. After hours of trying to recover it, it was eventually blown in place. Cpl Clinton Orr from 23 Field Squadron drove his bulldozer over to the bogged LAV III and tried to extricate it under fire. He was unable to do so and the bulldozer sustained numerous hits. He was forced to withdraw. He was later awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions. Corporal Joseph Ruffolo, whose vehicle it was, exposed himself to enemy fire to assist with the extrication. He too was awarded the Medal of Military Valour.

The order was given to withdraw to the riverbed. Close air support and artillery pounded the enemy perimeter as Bison ambulances arrived to get the wounded. Charles Company and 2 Troop extricated themselves with four dead and 10 wounded, leaving four destroyed vehicles in the kill zone. U.S. Army helicopters arrived to evacuate the wounded to the Role 3 hospital in KAF. The force then pulled back to positions at Ma'Sum Ghar and Bazaar-e Panjwayi, using fire and movement to break contact.⁷⁵ An airstrike was called in to destroy the bogged LAV III but it missed and hit the disabled Zettelmeyer instead.⁷⁶



Photo Credit: Courtesy LCol Geoff Athorpe

Canadian M-777 artillery from E Battery pounds insurgent positions in Zharey district with airburst high-explosive rounds.

As night descended, Charles Company and 23 Field Squadron sorted themselves out in the battle positions at and around Ma'Sum Ghar. The sniper detachments continued with observation of Pashmul and saw the blue flame of a cutting torch under the hull of the

stricken LAV III across the river. This was the insurgency's version of technical exploitation and may have played a role in the evolution of enemy IEDs later on. The CANSOF combat control team and U.S. Special Forces ODA 333 then joined the snipers in an attempt to maintain observation and engage targets using American fire assets. Several High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) missile strikes took place that night against leadership targets and sites as the enemy massed to celebrate their victory. The Afghan National Army company then got on the insurgent's radio net and started insulting them. This impromptu PSYOPS went on all night.⁷⁷ Maj Gen Freakley called Fraser after the ninth HIMARS and cut Regional Command (South) off as they were using up the in-theatre stocks: "It was like 'dial a HIMARS' day. Aegis fired more HIMARS than the 101st in the attack from Kuwait to Mosul!"⁷⁸

Fraser then met with Lavoie and told him to get his forces into Objective RUGBY the next day. Lavoie and his company commanders met and planned a feint east of the objective with Charles Company. The concept was to probe the enemy and identify their positions, and then launch the main attack against them.⁷⁹

The night bombardment produced fires north of the Arghandab River and some in the morning. Some compounds were still smoldering from the HIMARS strikes. Charles Company was waking up and eating in the open area, near a small compound on Ma'Sum Ghar dubbed Battle Position 301; a fire was lit and the garbage from the MRE and IMP rations was piled in and burned when the morning meal was completed. A Canadian joint terminal air controller was at this time observing and engaging targets of opportunity across the river. The team sighted enemy movement near one of the burning buildings and requested that a U.S. Air Force A-10 on station engage them. At about 0528 hours, the A-10 came over Ma'Sum Ghar from the south. The pilot had just removed his night vision goggles because of the change in the light; he mistook the plume of smoke from the burning garbage as the burning building he was directed to attack, and opened up with his 30mm GAU-8 Gatling gun. The rounds hit Charles Company, killing Pte Mark Graham and wounding 35 other Canadian soldiers, including Maj Sprague.⁸⁰

Every Canadian soldier with medical training descended on the strike site, including the CANSOF members. The Dragoons from ISTAR Squadron who had Tactical Combat Casualty Care training established a casualty collection point and relayed information up the chain using ISTAR Squadron's radio net. Two U.S. Army UH-60s swooped in to get the eight most seriously injured, while an Australian CH-47 Chinook helicopter with medical personnel from the Role 3 lifted off from KAF. E Battery shifted its fires and laid a smoke screen between Ma'Sum Ghar and the Arghandab River. One of the incoming CH-47s almost landed on the wrong side of the screen and was hurriedly brought on to the landing site before the enemy could engage it.⁸¹



Photo Credit: DND AR2006-P008-0030

The Operation MEDUSA 'gun line' north of Highway 1. A pair of Dutch Panzerkanone and a Canadian M-777 gun are overflown by a pair of UH-60s and an AH-64 attack helicopter.

Almost forgotten was a small group of Canadian engineers, gunners from E Battery with their mortars, and the Dutch para company up at FOB Martello in Shah Wali Kot district, which came under sustained small arms, mortar and RPG attack on 4 and 5 September 2006. A combination of Dutch 30mm fire from their mechanized infantry combat vehicles and Canadian 81mm mortar fire staved off assaults on the forward operating base until the Dutch could bring in reinforcements via an air assault with their CH-47 helicopters. Post-battle damage assessments estimated the enemy attacking force at 100 fighters, who used coordinated measures to assault the forward operating base with fire, manoeuvre and indirect fire support. The Canadians could only find 10 corpses that were left behind by the insurgents, so it was difficult to gain a full account of how much damage was inflicted on the enemy.⁸²

Operation MEDUSA was now very firmly stopped in its tracks as Fraser ordered a temporary cessation of combat operations. Charles Company had a leadership deficit with the company commander and company sergeant major wounded, two warrant officers killed and two more warrant officers wounded. The acting company sergeant major was now Sgt Scott Fawcett, while Capt Steve Brown received a battlefield promotion to major to take over the company.⁸³

The cumulative number of the casualties over the course of both days, and the fact that this was the second time in the war that the U.S. Air Force killed and wounded significant numbers of Canadian soldiers by accident now had far-reaching strategic effects. First, the

A-10 incident could play into the hands of those who opposed the mission and could be used to activate underlying anti-Americanism in Canada, with negative repercussions for the elected government. Second, there were concerns the incident would scare off possible NATO-member troop contributors, though the Europeans were not exactly lining up to join the fight in the south. In contrast to the 2002 incident, “The American pilot beat himself up pretty badly over it. He was a very religious man and was devastated....There was no repeat here of the arrogance that all of us in Canada perceived in Maj Harry Schmidt,” according to the CDS. The pilot’s superior told the CDS that “There’s nothing the U.S. Air Force could do to him that would be nearly as bad as what he’s doing to himself over this.”⁸⁴

Canadian officers in higher headquarters were inundated with Americans expressing anguish, “guys who were in tears that this had happened.” One officer “had probably 100 Americans come up to me including all of the one-stars and the two-stars apologizing for what happened.”⁸⁵ Canadian staff in Kabul had to explain to their American counterparts that there was a possibility that the incident could result in a non-confidence vote back in Canada and that the government might collapse, with serious detrimental effects to the coalition effort in Afghanistan. Canadian superiors told their officers that “if we have another multiple casualty day, the government might fall and we may get pulled out of theatre.”⁸⁶



Photo Credit: Courtesy LCol Geoff Abthorpe

During Operation MEDUSA 1 RCR overran enemy positions which were professionally sited and dug in. This was one position before overhead cover could be applied.

Task Force 31 and the Battle for Sperwan Ghar, 3-5 September 2006

After TF 31 reached southern Panjwayi district, the four ODAs and their associated Afghan National Army companies (really large reinforced platoons) moved onto the Akhyond Seheb Ghar feature to observe the valley. Capt Prohar counted over 400 people, non-fighting-age males, evacuating the area. The Sperwan and Zangabad areas were devoid of civilians “but full of bad guys.” The initial plan was for TF 31 to proceed north to establish a blocking position on the Arghandab River so that any insurgents withdrawing southwest from the 1 RCR battle group assault would be destroyed.⁸⁷ The ODA commanders monitoring events to the north through their deployed teams in Panjwayi district concluded that the sizable enemy force there could tip the balance if it slammed into the back of TF 3-06’s sub-units that were facing Pashmul. The three ODA team leaders passed their concerns to Lt Col Bolduc, who approved of their plan to seize the high ground at a place called Sperwan Ghar so that TF 31 could dominate the western end of Panjwayi district and call fires down on any enemy movement north. As TF 31 advanced in line abreast on the Sperwan Ghar feature (Objective BILLIARDS) on 3 September, it came under fire from enemy forces from north, south and east. The three ODAs boldly drove through a mined area in an attempted *coup de main* on Sperwan Ghar – the school, and other buildings, as it turned out, were loaded with insurgents and a protracted gun battle erupted before the hill could be gained. Running low on ammunition, TF 31 withdrew under cover of A-10s and Dutch AH-64 gunships. The proverbial hornet’s nest had been shaken: intelligence assessments concluded that there were, at the least, several hundred, and possibly up to 1000 insurgents in the area.⁸⁸ (See Figure 11-8)



Photo Credit: Author

This picture, taken from the communities south of Bazaar-e Panjwayi facing southwest, highlights the importance of the Sperwan Ghar feature. In 2006, coalition forces fought to retain control of this feature and subsequently, a patrol base was established on and around it. Due to an optical illusion, the Registan Desert appears to loom above Panjwayi district.

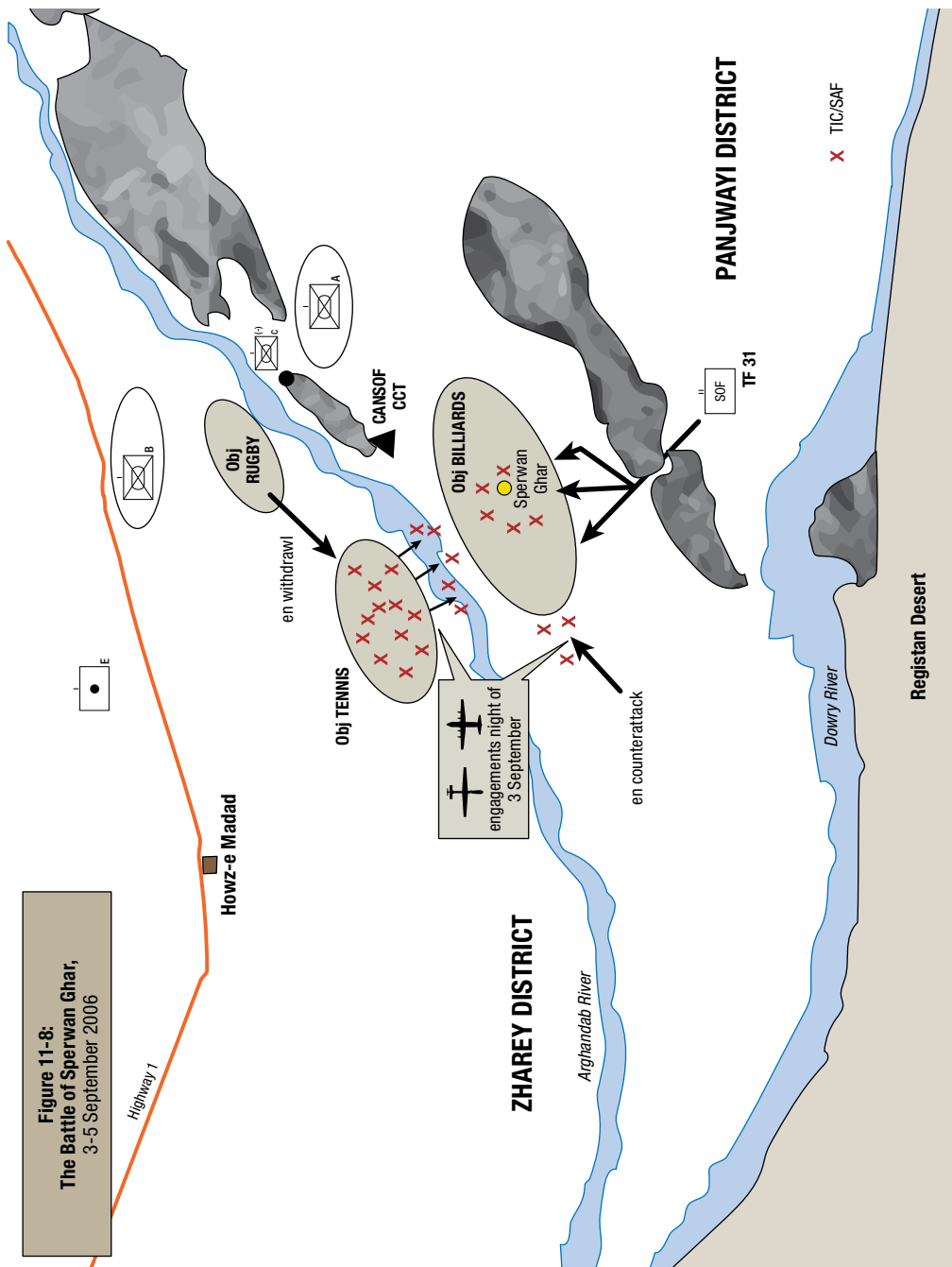


Figure 11-8: The Battle of Sperwan Ghar, 3-5 September 2006

TF 31's intelligence apparatus heard the Taliban calling back to Quetta for more fighters while the ODAs and their Afghan counterparts resupplied. The decision was made to go back in at 0500 the next morning, clear the school, and seize the hill. Under the unblinking eyes of MQ-1 Predators, TF 31 ODAs and the Afghans went back in and fought for the position in a desperate battle that lasted 13 hours. A major coordinated Taliban counterattack involving nearly 100 fighters was stopped in its tracks by a pair of A-10s dropping munitions danger close and generating large numbers of enemy casualties. The Taliban commanders in the area called for additional fighters from north of the river in Zharey. That night, AC-130 gunships orbited Sperwan Ghar, eliminating further enemy concentrations. Sensitive site exploitation at the school generated intelligence on enemy leadership locations, including Mullah Omar and Mullah Dadullah Lang. Special operations forces assets elsewhere targeted these locations. By this point, ODA 333 joined the Canadians at Ma'Sum Ghar and were able to provide observation south toward Sperwan Ghar and call fires down on any enemy movement. TF 31 had, after two days of operations, taken 12 wounded, one killed and had six vehicles disabled.⁸⁹

The fight was on for the next 24 hours as the .50 caliber machine guns on the vehicles used plunging fire to kill insurgents before they could get into small arms range, and F-18s from the American aircraft carrier bombed and strafed around TF 31. Insurgents mounted in groups of Toyota SUVs across the river in Zharey also came under fire as they tried to reinforce enemy efforts. As TF 31 looked for room to manoeuvre, their EOD personnel discovered nearly every building in Sperwan Ghar and Zangabad they traversed was rigged with booby traps. JDAMS were called in to destroy these buildings.⁹⁰

The enemy consisted of hundreds of personnel who were not 'aggrieved farmers.' Observers with TF 31 noted that "They were using modern conventional tactics. They were using fire and movement. They were trying to outflank us with [groups of] 12-15 men...they had chest rigs and AK-47s."⁹¹

On the night of 3 September 2006, TF 31 observed movement in Objective TENNIS. Groups of five Toyota trucks loaded with armed fighters arrived in TENNIS while others were observed moving to Zangabad, trying to surround TF 31 on Sperwan Ghar. AC-130s and carrier-based fighter-bombers were directed at the enemy forces as they tried to cross from TENNIS and attack BILLIARDS. As the American wounded mounted, Capt Prohar took over as second-in-command, working with the joint tactical air controllers directing airstrikes as waves of insurgents assaulted Sperwan Ghar. He was later awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions. Between 200 and 300 insurgents were killed that night in this area: at least this was the number of relatively intact bodies left on the battlefield that could be counted on the MQ-1 Predator imagery, so the number of wounded was likely much higher.⁹² Another 20 insurgents were killed as they tried to manoeuvre on the

Sperwan Ghar position. Taliban sources in Quetta admitted to 300 dead, and the hospitals on the other side of the Durand Line were flooded with hundreds of wounded. The fighting continued on and around the hill until 5 September, when the enemy temporarily backed off.⁹³

Freakley's promised reinforcements – C Company from 2-87 Infantry, more Afghan National Army troops and an additional ODA equipped with Gatling guns mounted on Hummers – arrived just in time for TF 31 to clear Objective BILLIARDS north of Sperwan Ghar to the river in order to set TF 31 up for the move on Objective TENNIS. The 2-87 Company was to the left and an Afghan company with its ETT was to the right facing north. C Company moved out and was ambushed nearly immediately, and the Afghan National Army started taking fire from the northeast. Observers on the Ghar noted that “it looked like fire ants pouring out of a great mound” as 50 Taliban fighters hit the Americans and Afghans. One American ETT was killed and three Afghans wounded. Copious amounts of artillery and close air support were used against insurgent locations, and this was only the start. The insurgents now renewed their efforts to take Sperwan Ghar.⁹⁴

The Afghans and Americans advanced to clear to the northeast and to the south. A huge firefight erupted to the northeast when the Afghan troops ran into a kill zone of three machine guns hidden in three buildings. The Americans and Afghan National Army held and fought back. The insurgents then manoeuvred, trying to flank the coalition forces, until AH-64 attack helicopters got on station and disrupted their movements. And, to everyone's surprise, they were hit with airburst RPG rounds. The snipers on the hill then saw the insurgent logistics and resupply system in action. Civilian pickup trucks in relay would drop off the enemy reinforcements and shuttle the wounded out. The snipers watched as the enemy deployed nearly an entire reserve company this way to augment the fight while it was in progress. At other times, the enemy probed the Sperwan Ghar perimeter in clockwise fashion with a platoon-sized unit, trying to find a weak spot to exploit. This high level of coordination was surprising to many observers.⁹⁵

Over the course of the two days, TF 31 and its augmentees used enough firepower to wear down the insurgents, who eventually retreated under constant bombardment from U.S. Navy F-18s and 105mm guns during the day and AC-130 gunships at night. Approximate coalition casualties were four dead and 12 wounded. The number of enemy casualties were difficult to confirm but was probably around 200.⁹⁶ Sperwan Ghar remained in coalition hands.

A platoon of Afghans and part of an American ODA moved toward the Arghandab River, hoping to gain an observation position on the high ground to disrupt cross-river movement when a substantial number of Taliban engaged them. Cut off, the group managed to act as ‘flypaper’ for close air support as the insurgents were drawn in while trying to capture the team, and killed; with them out of the way, TF 31 was now set to move on to Objective TENNIS.⁹⁷

The effects of TF 31's assault and seizure of Sperwan Ghar were dramatic. First, hundreds of enemy fighters in Panjwayi district were prevented from joining the fight in Zharey or from attacking TF 3-06 directly in Ma'Sum Ghar and Bazaar-e Panjwayi. Second, it drew in fighters from Zharey district right before TF 3-06 re-cocked and headed back into Pashmul. Regional Command (South), however, was faced with a new problem. The battle was no longer confined to Zharey district, and Sperwan Ghar could not be abandoned. Were there enough forces to clear Zharey, hold it, and hold Panjwayi district?

MEDUSA Reloaded: Back into Zharey District

According to TF 3-06's DCO Maj Martin Lipscey, Capt Macbeth's Recce Platoon "kept us in the game" with night patrols into Zharey district after the disastrous events of 3 and 4 September 2006. The first patrol went into enemy territory on 5 September looking for routes south from Highway 1 into eastern Zharey district. TF 3-06, according to Capt Macbeth, badly needed "Brown SA [situational awareness]" that is, a better understanding of the specifics of the ground for trafficability as opposed to interpreting lines on a map. Overhead imagery was not always useful; sometimes walls looked like roads and things that did not look passable, were in fact passable. LCol Lavoie's concern was that if the teams were too small "people would get caught and their heads cut off on YouTube," so there was plenty of coordination and protection. Predators and TUAV, for example, were able to identify enemy on compound roofs so that the patrols could bypass them.⁹⁸

During this time, ISTAR Squadron and the remains of Charles Company interdicted enemy movements in Zharey by essentially shooting at anything that moved; a heavy weapons detachment from an Afghan National Army kandak with American ETTs joined them and were able to provide intelligence from their Icom scanners. This led to operations whereby Icom 'chatter' was located and targeted, and any enemy personnel responding to handle casualties were also targeted. Once an insurgent commander inquired about the status of his personnel, he was then hit with artillery or an air strike.⁹⁹

Regional Command (South) and TF 3-06 were now working on their next moves. It is important to note here that Regional Command (South) also had to deal with several other provinces while MEDUSA was underway. By this point, it was evident to Fraser and his intelligence and operations staffs that the Taliban leadership was pouring everything it had into Zharey and Panjwayi districts. Taliban fighters from all of the provinces in Regional Command (South) were converging on the area, as were fighters coming in from Pakistan. That state of affairs afforded Fraser two opportunities. The first was to use this convergence to smash Mullah Dadullah Lang's large-scale operation and generate large-scale psychological effects on the Afghan population in Kandahar as well as on the Quetta Shura.

The second was to use this opportunity to firmly establish the British position in Helmand and the Dutch in Oruzgan. The provincial task forces were instructed to surge out, connect with the population, and make headway with security and development efforts.¹⁰⁰

As a result, the Helmand task force mounted Operations KADU, KUKRI, and MELA into the outlying populated areas of Musa Qala, Now Zad and Garmsir. The Dutch launched Operation ALEXANDER into the Chora Valley up in Oruzgan. The Americans and Romanians in Zabul did the same. The enemy response was a flurry of ineffective indirect fire attacks in four locations in Helmand, an ambush in Zabul and a contact in Oruzgan. Unfortunately, the insurgents moved on the Garmsir district centre and the Afghans, once again, abandoned it as they had in July.¹⁰¹

Back in Kandahar, the initial assessment of the enemy situation west of Kandahar City was that coalition indirect fire efforts in Zharey district from 3 to 4 September had killed 123 enemy personnel. More importantly, however, five identified enemy commanders had been targeted and killed and another two seriously wounded by a variety of means including HIMARS rockets. There were an estimated 120–200 enemy personnel remaining in the Siah Choy/Pashmul/Pasab triangle.¹⁰²

LCol Lavoie, toting his kit, returned to KAF by helicopter to meet with BGen Fraser as he thought he might be relieved of command. His instincts were correct, as there was substantial pressure from higher-level commanders for that course of action. After a hard conversation between the two men, Fraser asked Lavoie if he was with him and if so, what he thought the next course of action should be. Lavoie said that yes, he was with him and pulled out a map with a proposed course of action. Fraser made the decision to keep the 1 RCR commanding officer in the fight. This was, in his view, a strategic decision based on information operations perceptions regarding the enemy and Afghan allies, as well as psychological factors related to the continued operational effectiveness of TF 3-06.¹⁰³

Fraser and Lavoie came up with a new plan consisting of two sequential feints: one south from Highway 1, and another north from Ma'Sum Ghar/Bazaar-e Panjwayi. The feints would be timed one hour apart, with no decisive engagement. The engineers would breach in from the river. The idea was to force the enemy to move so they could be targeted with artillery and close air support.¹⁰⁴ The planning specifically addressed the requirements to establish stability and reconstruction “behind bounds,” as well as the need for information operations.¹⁰⁵ (See Figure 11-9)

Higher-level pressure was re-applied to get on with the mission. As a result modifications were made so that a force from the north would push south after the feints, the southern force would cross the river, breach in, link up and clear to the west. Regional Command (South) therefore had to re-orient its forces. The Danish Recce Platoon moved to screen Highway 1 with elements of ISTAR Squadron. Dismounted patrols continued south of the road to the first wadi line and sometimes beyond.

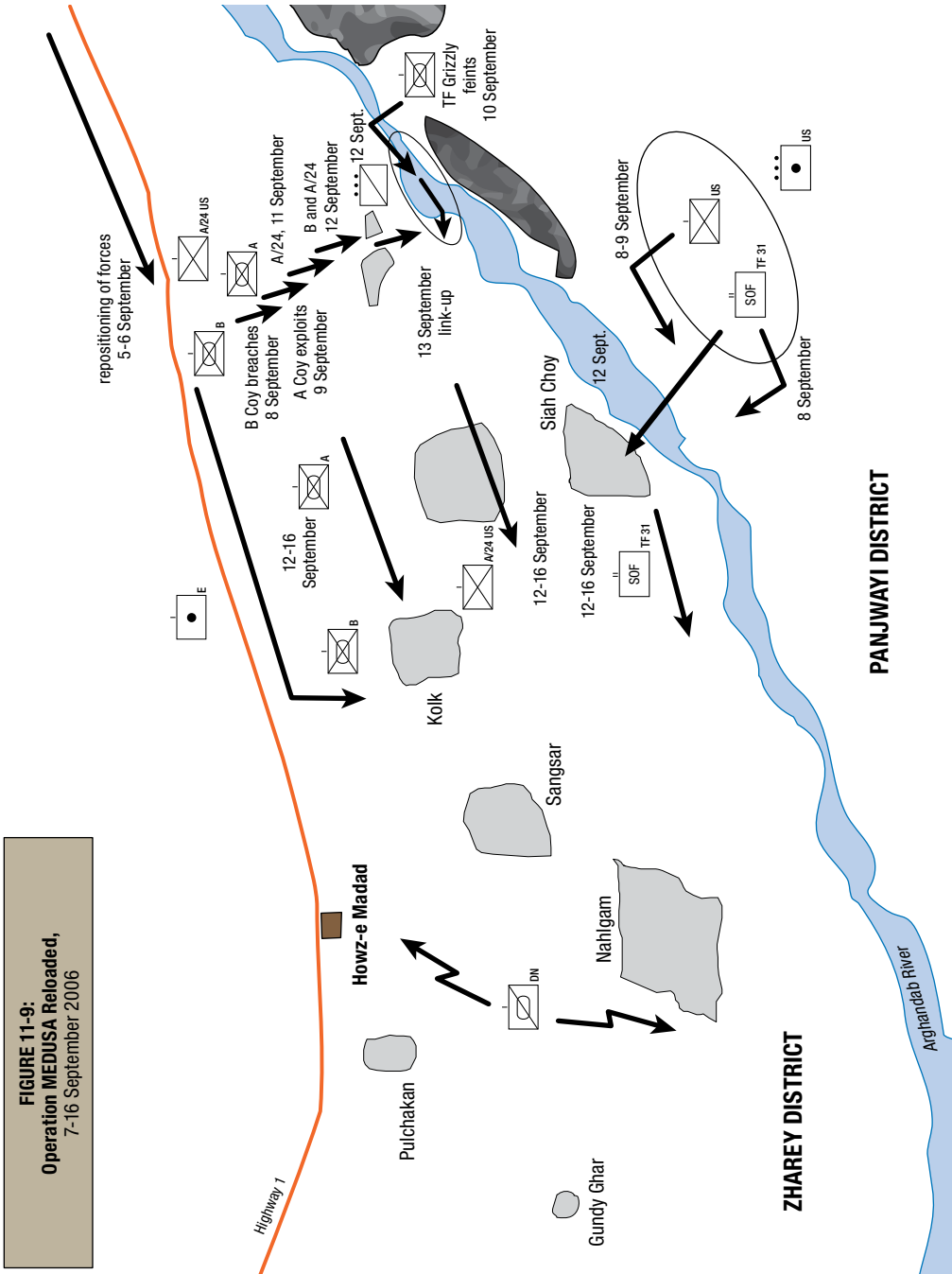


Figure 11-9: Operation MEDUSA Reloaded, 7-16 September 2006

TF 31 was being augmented, courtesy of Maj Gen Freakley who paid a surprise visit to Sperwan Ghar and asked what they needed. A company of Hummer-mounted infantry, C Company from 2-87 Infantry in Regional Command (East) drove down to Panjwayi while two 105mm guns were flown in. The concept that TF 31 would clear Objective BILLIARDS as part of the renewed effort now took shape. Another American infantry company, A Company, 2-4 Infantry, came into play and moved into Patrol Base Wilson. This left TF 3-06. A Company, plus the bulk of 23 Field Squadron and the guns, shifted to the northern front at Patrol Base Wilson. B Company was already screening along the first wadi line, south of the road. Charles Company was mostly *hors de combat*.¹⁰⁶

BGen Fraser determined that a deliberate deception operation would facilitate the seizure of eastern Zharey district from the north. As a result, Col Steve Williams, the American NCE commander, formed a scratch company from his headquarters. A platoon from Charles Company, a Canadian psychological operations detachment, and part of ISTAR Squadron joined them to become TF Grizzly. They proceeded to Bazaar-e Panjwayi. TF Coyote, a Dutch company operating at the western end of the Highway 1 length in Zharey, would disrupt south and secure the highway to stop the enemy from escaping along the route.¹⁰⁷

B Company had been in its positions for several days and Maj Abthorpe made the decision to dig in. His company had been engaged with recoilless rifles on 5 September, once the enemy realized there were available targets to their north. One LAV III was hit, producing five wounded. B Company applied all the firepower it had plus that of a Dutch AH-64, and burned down the school killing an estimated 20 enemy. On the night of 6 September, the insurgents tried to flank B Company with patrols: "We would send out the clearance patrols in the morning to check the trip wires on our flanks and they were all cut or missing...we never picked them up with all of our technology." Eventually the enemy slipped up and six were taken out with 25mm fire.¹⁰⁸

Orders were given for the advance during a meeting on 7 September. While LCol Lavoie and Maj Abthorpe were at KAF receiving them, a B Company clearance patrol operating along the first wadi line (code-named CRACKED ROOF) found an IED factory and drug lab. When forces were brought in to secure it, the company second-in-command Capt Max Michaud-Shields moved the company forward. This inadvertently triggered the advance, which forced DCO Maj Lipsey to take control of the battle group until the rest of the leadership could return from KAF. The first phase line, CRACKED ROOF, was taken without incident on 8 September as a result.¹⁰⁹

The inadvertent seizure of CRACKED ROOF took the entire chain of command by surprise. The imposition of artificial lines on a map had a tendency to become a psychological barrier the more removed planners were from the terrain and the battle. CRACKED ROOF

was not some heavily fortified Maginot Line, yet there was tendency to think that it was in some quarters in Kabul (note that this tendency would repeat itself time and time again in the Canadian area of operations during the course of the war).

The clearance of eastern Zharey district was a deliberate and methodical conventional-style operation. Maj Mark Gasparotto summed up the process:

We would fix the enemy with direct and indirect fires (including Close Air Support) while dismounted infantry supported by combat engineers would clear the vineyards and compounds out to 300m (effective RPG range). Often my sappers would create mouse holes in the compound walls with explosive satchel charges. These holes allowed the infantry to enter without going through possibly booby-trapped doorways. Then the dozers would breach a lane through the vineyards, connecting open areas, thus allowing the LAVs to move forward and link up with the dismounts. Once that bound was secure then the Route Clearance Package would clear Route COMOX to allow for resupply....at night recce patrols would scout forward of the front line and infantry companies would send out raiding parties to disrupt Taliban operations.¹¹⁰

On 9 September 2006, A Company passed through B Company's positions on CRACKED ROOF and established themselves at the second wadi line. Intelligence indicated that "the enemy was short on rations, medical supplies, and ammunition."¹¹¹ LCol Lavoie recalled "getting onto that first objective in the morning and it was a bit disgusting. You could see parts of heads and shapes like that, things the enemy did not have time to clean up, lots of blood trails but we're not finding bodies intact."¹¹² Resistance lessened as the forces drove south and both companies consolidated their positions and put out patrols. Recce Platoon had significant contacts each night as the forces progressed south but there were no heavy weapons emplaced to stop the 'Mad Max' bulldozers as they ploughed what would eventually become the basis of Route SUMMIT.¹¹³

The next day, 10 September, TF Grizzly conducted a feint:

Colonel [Steve] Williams directed the [PSYOPS] team to begin broadcasting across the river that 'the American Colonel is here to kill you, not the Canadians. We are going to come across the river and kill you.' TF Grizzly also directed White Phosphorus artillery fire on the river bank which ignited brush fires, followed by PSYOPS announcements that the Americans were going to burn the Taliban up.... The PSYOPS team played loud music, such as AC/DC's 'Back in Black', accompanied by heavy fire across the river from LAV-mounted 25mm cannon....The repetition of the music, accompanied by the cannon fire, was intended to induce the enemy to associate the loud music with the cannon fire so they would hunker down when the music began.¹¹⁴

B Company then moved on to Objective *TEMPLER* early that morning, while A Company, 2-4 Infantry prepared to move onto Objective *CROSSBOW*. After another night of recce patrols, the American infantry company took *CROSSBOW* on the morning of 11 September, while A Company secured a crossroads that led to Objective *LACROSSE*.¹¹⁵

Col Williams wanted to get across the Arghandab with his composite task force as soon as possible, but the remnants of C Company that were attached balked at the ad hoc crossing operation, which they viewed as not well thought out, and were deeply concerned about the provision of American fire support after the A-10 incident. Col Williams wanted the Canadians to obey his orders immediately. Maj Lussier intervened, understanding that there was a serious crisis of confidence with C Company, and that browbeating from a non-Canadian would be counterproductive. There would be a deliberate crossing at night with proper recce to make sure there were no IEDs waiting on the opposite bank.¹¹⁶

A night patrol with engineers cleared the bank, TF Grizzly crossed over and was into the eastern part of Objective *RUGBY* by 0830. There, they found an incredible number of body parts strewn everywhere, even in the trees. Nothing was left alive. Checkpoints and command posts were blown apart, and the detritus of a fleeing army was in evidence as the Canadians and Americans swept through the area. There was unexploded ordnance all over the entire objective. Recce Platoon emerged from their concealed positions and linked up with TF Grizzly.¹¹⁷ Further examination uncovered “the actual fighting positions...it looked like the same thing we would do. It looked like classic trenches, in-depth, especially with communications trenches, the same way we would envision a Soviet [company-sized] position.”¹¹⁸

Col Steve Williams asked BGen Fraser permission to continue the advance through *RUGBY*. This was granted and TF Grizzly cleared west almost to Objective *TENNIS*. On the evening of 12 September 2006, A Company, 2-4 Infantry, a LAV platoon from B Company, and an engineer troop passed through A Company and moved into *LACROSSE*. B Company continued to consolidate in *CRICKET*, while Recce Platoon went into Objective *RUGBY* that night. By 13 September 2006, the formal link up between Lavoie and Williams had occurred and the consolidation in *RUGBY* took place.¹¹⁹

There was not a lot of enemy contact during this phase of the operation. Critics at the time, specifically American critics, believed that the methodical nature of this phase of the operation was ponderous and allowed the enemy to escape. Some even derisively referred to *MEDUSA* as “*CANACONDA*” with reference to the problematic 2002 American-led battle in Shah-i-Kot Valley. At one point Maj Gen Freakley, who had substantial experience as a mentor at the U.S. Army National Training Center, arrived on the scene, and attempted to coach LCol Lavoie into increasing the pace of the operation.¹²⁰ Apparently, Freakley asked Lavoie if he had read the Bible, to which a perplexed Lavoie replied, not lately.

Freakley told Lavoie that he was acting as Saint Paul the Encourager. Lavoie replied that if that was so, then Lavoie was Saint Thomas the Doubter. LCol Lavoie chose to proceed methodically and BGen Fraser supported him in this.¹²¹

There were other factors to consider, however. TF 31 was heavily engaged in Objective BILLIARDS at this time and had to delay its move on to Objective TENNIS.¹²² By 7 September, TF 31's sub-units repositioned on Objective BILLIARDS facing TENNIS, and mounted disruption patrols in the area. These moves generated a series of contacts throughout the area that over a two-day period resulted in 150 enemy killed in direct fire confrontations and another 110 killed by mortars, artillery or air support.¹²³

The inability of the Dutch company and Danish recce unit to move in and block to the west in central Zharey, due to their restrictive national caveats preventing them from engaging in combat,¹²⁴ coupled with this delay, probably facilitated the withdrawal of the remaining insurgent fighters that were about to be trampled by the Canadian and American forces moving inexorably from north to south and east to west.¹²⁵ The limitations of using aerial observation linked to fires as an economy of force method to block enemy movements in dense terrain like Zharey were becoming apparent but had not yet been codified. However, the possibility that the MEDUSA operation simply annihilated the bulk of the forward-deployed insurgent forces in both districts, and that there were very few unscathed fighters left to escape, should be considered.

Most importantly, however, were the constant demands by ISAF HQ to publicly announce the establishment of the ADZ in Kandahar. The MEDUSA plan specifically catered to effects mitigation, reconstruction, and then development. Rushing a battle group through the terrain in the manoeuvrist pursuit of the insurgents was all well and good. However, if the areas where the battle group passed through were not cleared of unexploded ordnance and IEDs, and all insurgents and their infrastructure were not rooted out (bunkers blown up, trenches filled in, caches found and destroyed), then the enemy would just flow back in when the coalition forces left and interfere with the reconstruction process. The coalition would be back to square one. There could be no ADZ in Kandahar without the methodical clearance and holding of Zharey district. This is something the critics did not address in their haste to denigrate the Canadian task force.

Operation MEDUSA: 12-30 September 2006

TF 31 became the Brigade main effort on 12 September. That day TF 31 launched half of its forces across the Arghandab River to clear Objective TENNIS while the other half secured Objective BILLIARDS. Once across, the forces engaged a small group of

insurgents, killing them. The special forces also found piles of “weapons, radios, phones, and bodies...indicating Taliban fighters departing the objective in a panic.”¹²⁶ Further exploitation uncovered IED caches and documents in Arabic.

The final dispositions of the coalition forces as of 13 September had most of an Afghan kandak occupying Bazaar-e Panjwayi; A Company was in RUGBY EAST, with B Company in RUGBY CENTRE, and TF Grizzly in RUGBY WEST. A Company, 2-4 Infantry departed Objective LACROSSE and headed for Route Comox for a flank security task. Exploitation of RUGBY uncovered defensive positions and a tunnel complex.¹²⁷ 23 Field Squadron also unearthed several pressure-plate IEDs and discovered Italian TC-6 plastic anti-tank mines set up as triple stacks. During the course of the clearance, 23 Field Squadron's D-7 dozer detonated a large IED, disabling it. Other deep buried mine stacks were discovered in the vicinity of the crossing point and from there back to the White School; Canadian equipment did not detect them and they were later found by accident.¹²⁸

Over the next day and half, the forces repositioned in preparation for Phase 3. A Company departed for Waiting Area MOUNTAIN, A Company, 2-4 Infantry moved to RUGBY WEST, TF Grizzly to RUGBY EAST. B Company withdrew to Highway 1, moved west, and then south down Route Victoria in the vicinity of the Gundy Ghar feature to establish blocking positions. They encountered no resistance. Recce Platoon moved to handle route security on Highway 1. TF 31 remained in TENNIS and the Afghans with their ETTs remained in Bazaar-e Panjwayi. There was little or no contact throughout this period, even by B Company.¹²⁹

On the morning of 15 September, A Company stepped off heading west clearing along Route St Johns, while A Company, 2-4 Infantry did the same paralleling on Route Ottawa. TF 31's area of operations was south of A Company, 2-4 Infantry's, and their ODAs and Afghans headed west between Route Ottawa and the Arghandab River. TF Grizzly moved to deal with rear area security around Comox. By 1600 hours, the forces cleared to Route Abbotsford. There was no contact.¹³⁰

From 16 to 18 September, Regional Command (South) re-aligned its forces. A Company 2-4 Infantry had to return to its area of operations elsewhere. Two company areas of operations were established: B Company was responsible for the Victoria-Abbotsford box while A Company took the area from Abbotsford to Comox, with TF Grizzly continuing with its security tasks around Comox. B Company returned to KAF for refit and ISTAR took over, with A Company moving to B Company's area. The only significant incident involved a suicide vehicle-borne IED attack on Maj Abthorpe's vehicle on the way back to KAF. In effect, Phase 3 was complete.¹³¹ Lt Gen Richards announced on 17 September that Operation MEDUSA was “successfully completed.”¹³²

Despite the Richards announcement, the most important part of Operation MEDUSA, the Phase 4 stabilization and governance phase, still had to play out. Neither Zharey nor Panjwayi districts were completely clear of insurgents. On the morning of 18 September, A Company was mounting its daily patrols when 2 Platoon and its accompanying combat engineers stopped to talk to two young girls. An elderly individual riding a bicycle then approached and detonated amongst the platoon. In the ensuing explosion, the suicide bomber killed Pte David Byers, Cpl Shane Keating, Cpl Keith Morley from 2 PPCLI and Cpl Glen Arnold, a medic from 2 Field Ambulance; 16 other Canadians were wounded, plus two Afghans.¹³³

As the UH-60 and CH-47 helicopters arrived to take away the dead and wounded, the analysis began. A and B Companies, as well as Recce Platoon, had saturated the area with patrols, so it was a target-rich environment. This particular attack occurred on the morning of 18 September 2006, which was the day Parliament opened back home in Canada. Given the hour of the attack, it would have hit the evening news. This was too coincidental; suicide attacks had until then been confined to the populated areas around Kandahar City. Maj Wright noted that it “was not too sophisticated for the enemy to get a cell phone call request to generate mass casualties at a particular time.”¹³⁴

A Company and the ISTAR units were ordered into leaguers north of their patrol areas closer to Highway 1.¹³⁵ This in effect meant that the area from Route Comox to Victoria remained sporadically patrolled for some days. This likely facilitated enemy repositioning and bought them time to recover. There were other effects. One officer noted that “soldiers now worried about the population as a threat and escalations of force became a problem. The leadership had to really grip this.”¹³⁶

Meanwhile, LCol Hetherington and the PRT staff worked to coordinate post-battle effects mitigation with the provincial authorities. What was the plan to re-populate Zharey district? The Afghan members of the Disaster Management Committee, working with UN organs in Kandahar and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, determined that they would have teams to “go out and meet the villagers in their area and say ‘Let’s go to your property.’ They’d go to the property and say ‘We’re going to make sure you get ten tons of bricks dropped here where you can rebuild your compound.’ We could handle that with Commanders Contingency Fund money. Then the teams would have to identify where the families were going and get foodstuffs brought in. We would work through the existing Community Development Council and district development assemblies structure to understand where the priorities would be.”¹³⁷ The Governor, Asadullah Khalid, accepted the plan and a subsequent shura with the district power brokers went well.

Then there were the police. Police were crucial if the government was going to hold Zharey district. A national plan to jumpstart police presence throughout Afghanistan was at this time in the offing and fell out of the Policy Action Group recommendations and the ADZ strategy.¹³⁸

Called the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), it was a stopgap measure for a planned two years until fully trained police from the DynCorp-run regional training centers were ready. Raised through district shuras in conjunction with the new regional police chiefs, the ANAP was a partially-trained militia that had slightly more allegiance to the national government than the existing Afghan National Police, who were mostly re-rolled AMF members. The PRT had been tracking auxiliary police development and it was promising, but the force development stalled when it became enmeshed in bureaucracy and politics.¹³⁹

The Afghan National Army had portions of two kandaks in the MEDUSA fight. When MEDUSA wound down in late September, however, Afghan National Army had to pull out. One kandak from 209 Corps in the north had to return home as part of its rotation, leaving part of 2nd Kandak, 1st Brigade from 205 Corps covering Bazaar-e Panjwayi. This kandak did superb work protecting the town during MEDUSA and was instrumental in resettlement of the population there, but it too was tasked elsewhere and departed.¹⁴⁰

There was money from the Canadian Army; and there was money from the U.S. Army. The Afghans had a plan in place to use it. Phase 4 was ready to go, except some things were missing. The population was not returning to Zharey district. Despite the fact that TF Grizzly reported returning population, these people were mostly returning back to Bazaar-e Panjwayi and not in sufficient numbers to Zharey district. As LCol Hetherington noted ruefully, “The people did want to go back, and the ones that came back were met by reconstruction engineers from the city, but the engineers would not go in, claiming it was too dangerous because they had been told by the [battle group] that the Taliban was still meeting in there.” The ANAP who should have been there to escort these people and protect them did not show up either. LCol Lavoie reported that he did not have the forces to continue to clear and hold the area.¹⁴¹ This set the stage for the next act in the MEDUSA drama.

Route SUMMIT

Regional Command (South) and TF 3-06 were confronted with a huge problem. What to do next? The enemy helped with this decision by re-infiltrating the battle area and IED'ing Route Comox and the other north-south routes between Highway 1 and Bazaar-e Panjwayi. There were no less than seven IED strikes against the battle group in the space of a week, plus several strikes against civilians. Several soldiers, American and Canadian, were wounded. According to Maj Gasparotto, “These incidents precipitated the order to build Route Summit.” LCol Lavoie ordered the construction of a road that would connect Patrol Base Wilson on Highway 1 with a planned forward operating base that would be built on the Ma'Sum Ghar feature. Another forward operating base would be built on the other side of the Arghandab across from FOB Ma'Sum Ghar so that the crossing point would be protected; its site was right on the location of the destroyed Zettelmeyer earthmover

and became known as FOB Zettelmeyer.¹⁴² The route was divided into sectors to facilitate control and construction. Several strong points were added to the plan later on: North, Centre and South, each capable of housing a platoon. The idea was that these facilities would transition later on into police stations or Afghan National Army patrol bases

Route Summit really started as an expedient, unpaved combat road, not the paved highway it is today. During the fighting, existing lanes had been widened by the engineers to get the vehicles through. LCol Lavoie wanted the ability to move back and forth with open fields of fire to avoid ambushes. The fact that this road would occupy exactly where Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri (from the Disaster Management Committee, and a Provincial Development Committee member from Panjwayi district) had started his Bazaar-e Panjwayi connector route back in 2005 before being thwarted by local power brokers was not purely coincidental. He became an “interlocutor” on the project, according to LCol Hetherington. Dastagiri became a primary figure in the pay out of funds to the landowners who had their land expropriated for the project in Zharey district. He took his cut for brokering the deals, as such “lubrication” was the best and only way to get the job done quickly, and from a certain perspective, safely.¹⁴³ The economic benefits of having Route Summit in place were clearly attractive to the PRT and the Provincial Development Committee.

When word went back to ISAF HQ in Kabul about the future plans to build and then pave Route Summit in order to “IED proof” it, substantial pressure was brought to bear on Regional Command (South) to “allow” Germany to pay for it; Germany could say they were contributing to the war in the south without actually sending troops. Nobody expected that a battalion of German combat engineers would materialize and start paving, but weeks became months and no German resources arrived. The German CIDA equivalent, GTZ (Agency for Technical Co-operation), was supposed to come down from Regional Command (North) but it conducted no work on Summit.¹⁴⁴

To build Route Summit, 23 Field Squadron used its rented/borrowed/liberated “Mad Maxed” bulldozers. The squadron was also assigned two LAV III infantry platoons, while ISTAR Squadron with its Coyotes and Recce Platoon maintained over-watch. Construction kicked off on 29 September 2006 and involved grape hut demolition, the removal of vineyard trenches, and the widening of the combat road and its verges to 100 metres. The idea was to position three strong points along the 6.5-kilometre route and to have lines of sight from one position to the next, from Patrol Base Wilson all the way to FOB Ma’Sum Ghar, so that the enemy would be deterred from either moving across the Summit line or laying IEDs. However, when the operation started, Pte Klukie from 1 RCR triggered a large IED, which killed him.¹⁴⁵ PO2 James Leith was luckier: after his vehicle hit an IED in Pashmul, he found a secondary device that was unstable.

The EOD equipment was destroyed in the initial blast. This forced Leith to use his bayonet to dismantle the second device, which he did successfully. PO2 Leith was awarded the Star of Courage for his actions.

Effects Mitigation: Provincial Reconstruction Team Operations

With all of the fighting going on, it is easy to overlook PRT operations. For most of fall, LCol Hetherington was focused on effects mitigation in the wake of operations:

My CIMIC teams were like reconstruction FOO parties (I'm a Gunner). I'd create a PRT Detachment, cut them to the companies where they would travel under their security and work with that company commander as a deliverer of non-kinetic effects, whether it's through liaison or small projects, but they would always have that reach-back capability to the KPRT so that if they said 'Hey, you, know, maybe we need CIDA to look at something bigger here, or maybe we need a link to an NGO.... During BAAZ TSUKA we deployed a CIMIC Coordination Centre to the battle group headquarters.¹⁴⁶

However, three CIDA personnel arrived to replace Michael Callan in August 2006. Gavin Buchan from DFAIT also joined the team. Despite the severely reduced amount of NGO and UN activity in the province, LCol Hetherington still was responsible for helping the Afghans coordinate activities, so he established a Project Targeting Board to assess and prioritize each project and assign it to the right end-user. The PRT was, however, hampered bureaucratically in two ways. First, the CIDA representative essentially conducted a protracted academic debate over how worthwhile each project was, while the military personnel wanted tangible and visible effects immediately. Second, CIDA-controlled spending authority remained, as it had in Kabul three years previously, highly centralized, bureaucratic, and thus glacially slow.

Then there was the UN. The PRT naturally gravitated to the UNAMA and sought its input on how to handle the post-MEDUSA environment to rebuild Zharey and get the population back in. This meant demining, shelter reconstruction, transport back to Zharey and provision of food. In theory, the World Food Program, the UN deminers, and UN HABITAT should have been able to handle these requirements. In Kandahar, the UNAMA office's response was incredibly bureaucratic: it essentially refused to deal with the PRT and insisted that the request come from the Afghan government. LCol Hetherington wanted to empower the Disaster Management Committee (led by Dastagiri), and get Afghans working with the Canadian PRT and UNAMA together. Ultimately, the World Food Program was the only organization that was willing to contribute anything meaningful.¹⁴⁷

LCol Hetherington bypassed those barriers with Commanders Contingency Fund monies and gave his CIMIC detachments what he called “cases o’ cash.” CIMIC operators like WO Dean Henley and Sgt Nicky Bascon and others working in Zharey and Panjwayi were able to get the schools at Sperwan and Bazaar-e Panjwayi re-opened by working with local power brokers like Dastagiri.

LCol Hetherington and the PRT also played an important role in maintaining contact, socially as well as developmentally, with key power brokers. This was not easy when all of the attention was focused west of the city, but if these and other connections had been neglected, operations conducted in 2007 and later would have become even more problematic. LCol Hetherington was also the main point of contact with the Governor, Asadullah Khalid. He kept pushing Khalid to make the Provincial Development Committee something more than nascent, but there was “no prioritization, no coordination...the framework of a bureaucracy just did not exist in the governor’s office at that time.”¹⁴⁸ There was no provincial SAT-A-like organization mentoring in Kandahar.

That had to wait, however, as there were more urgent problems developing in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. The implementation of humanitarian and reconstruction efforts slowly unmasked the reality of power rivalries in those districts. This afforded a view into what was happening in the province beneath the surface of day-to-day commerce and discourse, and provided insight into what fuelled the insurgency at the local level.

Member of Parliament and the leader of Senjaray, Habibullah Jan, perceived the Dastagiri-led Disaster Management Committee as not distributing aid equitably in his area. The Governor, Asadullah Khalid, told the PRT that Habibullah Jan provided logistical support to the Taliban. When the PRT met with Jan, he told them that police on Highway 1, led by a Col Akka who was appointed by Asadullah Khalid, were harassing people and extorting money from them. Jan claimed that Khairuddin, the district leader for Zharey, was Ahmad Wali Karzai’s cousin and that the Governor had appointed him as well. Furthermore, Khairuddin rented out the tractors donated by the non-governmental organizations instead of passing them on to those who needed them.¹⁴⁹

The upshot, as the PRT learned from local people, was that:

contributing factors to the worsening security situation are the interference of the foreigners, poor governance, and broken promises...the recent bombardment during Operation MEDUSA was cowardly, ruthless, and discriminatory towards civilian targets [there was criticism] of the Governor of Kandahar for not assisting the civilians...there was a failure of the NSP, poppy eradication, and high unemployment rates...the government does not build any madrassas inside the province and youth end up in Pakistani madrassas getting brainwashed.¹⁵⁰

The PRT concluded that:

Engagements with locals are a blunt testimony to the widespread corruption in all levels: administrative, judicial, and executive, of the provincial government. The aim of ISAF and the KPRT is to support institutions and not individuals eg: supporting the governance and not the Governor of Kandahar. However, if these institutions are run by the people who are known for incompetency, corruption, mischief, and abusing the public trust then the population will see us as part of the problem and not the solution.¹⁵¹

Transitioning from MEDUSA: Robust “Capability Enhancement.”

Over the course of 2006, BGen Fraser was less and less enthralled with the accuracy of close air support. There had been near misses during TF Orion’s time that did not sit comfortably with the Canadian leadership. At the end of August 2006, Fraser and his staff spoke with LGen Gauthier about the need for additional capabilities. Three days before the deadly A-10 strike on 4 September, Commander CEFCOM’s visit report took note of a long list of items, sub-units and enablers. What BGen Fraser was looking for, however, were tanks. He wanted an accurate, direct fire capability that could be used immediately, not when someone else’s aircraft happened to be available and the rules of engagement planets were in alignment.¹⁵² (The Israelis, for example, placed an overreliance on airpower as “flying artillery” to the detriment of the combined arms team in 1956 and 1967, and paid the price in blood during the 1973 war).

Gauthier’s post-visit report in early September obliquely referred to the fact that “Requirements have since grown to include the identified need for armour and to adjust the TO&E [Table of Organization and Equipment] to provide more depth in armoured fighting vehicles.”¹⁵³ Fraser and staff wanted another infantry company, counter-mortar capability, better counter IED and armoured engineers. They wanted improvements to the PRT, specifically some form of protected CIMIC that, unlike the OGDs, was willing and could go into dangerous areas. This was deemed as crucial as the PRT was limited in where and what it could do – and there was more.

Of course, that “more” would cost money and Ottawa, as usual, did not want to spend money. Ottawa had thus far fought the war on the cheap and feebly continued to portray operations in Afghanistan as ‘not war.’ There were concerns in Ottawa that deploying vehicles like tanks would finally ‘confirm’ to the vocal critics that Canada was actually at war. Moreover, there were the usual armchair experts who would publicly question the value of tanks in a ‘counterinsurgency’ environment. There were other blockages, including the ponderous Canadian government acquisition process and staff in Ottawa who had a vested interest in replacing the Leopards with a dangerously vulnerable gun-over armour



Photo Credit: DND AS2006-0954a

BGen David Fraser requested the deployment of Canadian Leopard tanks after a platoon from 1 RCR was shot up and put out of action by a U.S. Air Force A-10 attack aircraft on the second day of Operation MEDUSA.

system called Stryker.¹⁵⁴ The Chief of the Land Staff, LGen Andrew Leslie, decided to cut through the nonsense, called LCol Lavoie and asked him: “Can you use tanks?” Lavoie replied, “Fuck, yes, I can use tanks!”¹⁵⁵ That settled the matter.

The priority enhancements became a Leopard C-2 tank squadron, a mechanized infantry company in LAV III, two more M-777 guns, another recce troop with Coyotes and an armoured engineer squadron with Badger armoured engineer vehicles (AEVs). In addition, there would be a HALO counter-mortar detection system, a replacement engineer field troop, and individual augmentation for Health Services, Intelligence and the National Support Element. The need for a route clearance package was noted but it would have to be acquired – all of the other capabilities were on hand in Canada. Units and formations back in Canada dropped everything to make this happen, but it was unlikely that these reinforcements would get to theatre before October.¹⁵⁶

Gauthier’s report also looked at needed changes to the command and control structure. These changes would be implemented when Canada handed off control of Regional Command (South) in November and would be examined later on.

October 2006: The Summit Strong Point Engagements

The TF 3-06 command staff took stock and concluded that Operation MEDUSA Phase 3 really “did not occur” and that Phase 4 “was announced” but not really acted upon. They characterized the shift in the form of enemy activity to “ambushes and guerrilla attacks to disrupt security.” For all intents and purposes, this was a whole new operation, even though it was not assigned a code name. LCol Lavoie wanted to “expand the security bubble around Summit.”¹⁵⁷ (See Figure 11-10)

The enemy, however, were more than prepared to try and prick the bubble. 23 Field Squadron believed that the enemy were deliberately targeting its three bulldozers, knowing full well that without the machines, the road could not be built. It was not unusual to see four LAV IIIs and a platoon of infantry protecting a single bulldozer. On several occasions, the enemy directed RPG fire at them, fortunately to no effect.¹⁵⁸

ISTAR Squadron and 23 Field Squadron were at work on Summit and, for protective purposes, established a leaguer south of Pasab near the former Objective TEMPLAR. ISTAR Squadron also had an observation post to the north containing two Coyotes and a Mobile Electronic Warfare Team. They could oversee work on Sectors 2 and 3 from this position. Usually this leaguer held several Coyotes but on the night of 3 October 2006, the road-building equipment and an American Route Clearance Package were also present.¹⁵⁹

The electronic warfare team detected enemy preparations minutes before three enemy assault groups, from both west and east, attacked the observation post and the leaguer. A volley of RPG, fired from compounds 70 metres to the east, struck both positions. Two Dragoons, Sgt Craig Gillam and Cpl Robert Mitchell, were killed and five other Canadians wounded. An American Hummer carrying explosives took a hit to its trailer, wounding three American sappers. Maj Lussier had the LAVs pour 25mm fire on the enemy positions while Maj Gasparotto escorted the two other American Hummers loaded with wounded up to Patrol Base Wilson. The Husky vehicle from the route clearance package was immobilized, as was one Coyote. The enemy withdrew and took their casualties with them.¹⁶⁰ This attack forced work on Sector 2 to stop. As a result Strong Point North’s construction was accelerated so that a presence could be maintained in that area. The observation coverage on Sector 2 was attenuated, however, and this gave the enemy an opportunity to lay IEDs. One blew up an RG-31, killing Trooper Mark Wilson from the RCD. In a later incident Maj Gasparotto’s LAV III was also subjected to a disabling IED strike.¹⁶¹

The critical need for the strong points to control Summit drove their expedient completion in early October. Strong Point North (“The Ghetto”) and Strong Point Centre (“Castle Greyskull”) went in first. After a few small-arms fire incidents demonstrated the need for more defensive depth, Strong Point West (“The Hacienda”) was also constructed.

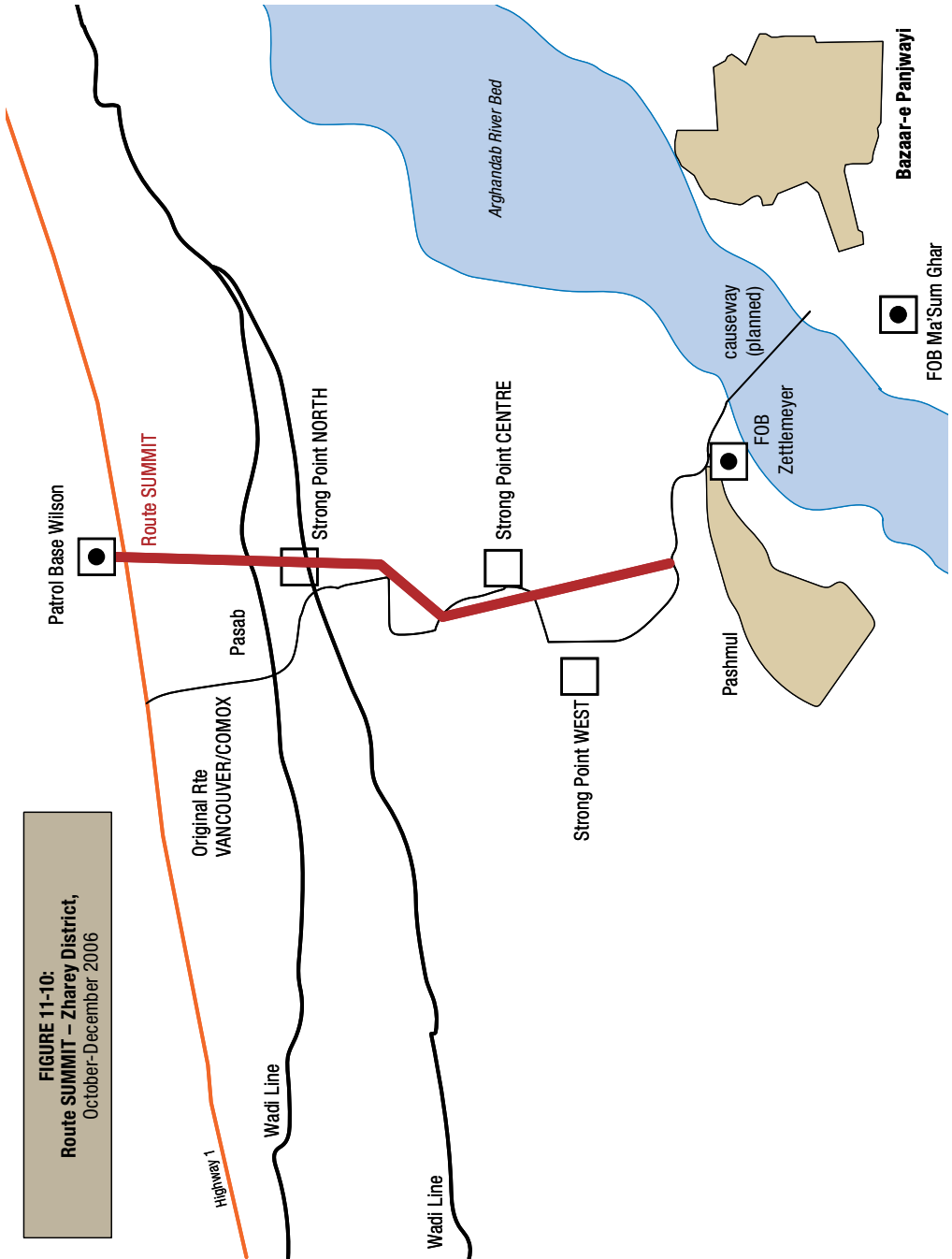


FIGURE 11-10:
Route SUMMIT – Zharey District,
October-December 2006

Figure 11-10: Route SUMMIT – Zharey District, October-December 2006

These strong points were designed to house a platoon and its vehicles. Each had a mortar pit, an elevated observation position, and run-ups so the LAV IIIs could use their 25mm cannon. TF 3-06 worked out a rotation plan so that one company-sized group could man the strong points, while maintaining another company up in FOB Martello. The remnants of Charles Company were the first to occupy the strong points in mid-October, replacing the ISTAR Squadron and 23 Field Squadron troops.

For the first two weeks of October, the enemy employed what was estimated to be a platoon-sized fighting group against the Summit construction project. The enemy sections would initiate a contact right before sunset and use the darkness to exfiltrate. Strong Point West attracted a significant amount of small-arms fire because of its location.¹⁶²

On the night of 14 October, however, the enemy mounted their most sophisticated attack yet with four simultaneous ambushes. An engineer LAV III was engaged from the west with an 82mm recoilless rifle near the junction of Summit and Comox; they returned fire and a Dutch AH-64 came in to assist. A LAV III from Charles Company moved to join them when they were engaged, this time from the east. LCol Lavoie's tactical headquarters was moving down Summit and it was engaged as well.



Photo Credit: Author

This is the remains of 1 RCR's Strong Point Centre, which endured fierce fighting in fall 2006. Strong Point Centre was one of several positions established to protect Route Summit, which linked Highway 1 with Bazaar-e Panjwayi.

9 Platoon, occupying Strong Point Centre, took multiple mortar, RPG, and 82mm recoilless rounds from enemy positions to the west. One vehicle was hit, killing Sgt Darcy Tedford and Pte Blake Williamson, wounding two more. During the course of the action, MCpl Jeremy Leblanc took over his section from Tedford, attended to the wounded, and rallied the section to return fire and hold their position. 9 Platoon called in E Battery to suppress the fire, which was coming from grape trenches and compounds. Enemy small-arms fire continued, despite the bombardment, against all of the engaged Canadian callsigns for nearly an hour. A Bison ambulance on its way to recover the wounded then broke down on Summit, which forced a LAV III from 1 RCR's TAC and another from 9 Platoon to evacuate the wounded to Patrol Base Wilson. The two LAV IIIs escorted a HLVW wrecker back to the Bison – and then it broke down. The Bison was towed to Strong Point Centre. The enemy then attacked FOB Zettelmeyer from the west with small-arms fire. After more artillery was dropped on them, the enemy forces withdrew to the west.¹⁶³ MCpl Leblanc was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.



Photo Credit: Courtesy LCol Geoff Abthorpe

Strong Point West near Pashmul was assaulted by two waves of insurgents on the night of 29 December 2006. Running low on ammunition, B Company was reinforced by the Leopard tank squadron and beat back the enemy.

In any other conflict, past and present, defensive positions like these would have had the full array of stores to ensure that the enemy kept their distance, which in turn would reduce their accuracy, or deter them altogether. Canadian policy, however, prevented the soldiers of TF 3-06 from making use of all possible means. As one engineer reported, “The platoons were doing their best. The ground was extremely difficult to cover and the Taliban operating in the area were highly skilled at infiltration. I have no doubt that anti-personnel mines covering the approaches to Route Summit would have stopped some of these attacks.”¹⁶⁴ Those disarmament proponents, especially those in DFAIT who supported the Ottawa Treaty with such messianic fervor, in effect denuded Canadian soldiers of the traditional tools when they needed them. It was, according to some observers, yet another example of how the ‘peacekeeping’ era had detrimental effects on Canadian Army operations.

Progress on Route Summit stalled and “was in jeopardy of failure.” That said, a small number of people were starting to return to their compounds in Sector 1, the closest to Patrol Base Wilson and Strong Point North. The lack of protected bulldozers and engineer equipment was a significant problem. Local contractors, especially ones providing gravel for the road, used unprotected civilian vehicles and were increasingly reluctant to participate. In addition, there were contracting issues, something which the PRT became increasingly involved in. Ultimately, Route Summit issues were elevated up to ISAF HQ and after some deliberation, there was agreement: Canada would fund Sector 6, USAID would fund Sector 5 (which was where the bridge across the Arghandab would go); and Germany would fund Sectors 1 through 4. Canadian money was readily available but according to an officer involved, “The Germans eventually released their funds but the delay cost the battle group an extra two months guarding the road. USAID never did fund the bridge.”¹⁶⁵

On 21 October 2006, 23rd Field Squadron finally got its four Badger AEVs so they could continue to work in the semi-permissive environment – just in time for the fall rains. Unprecedented rainfall, after years and years of drought, turned Route Summit into Lake Summit. An expedient causeway across the Arghandab River made of concrete culverts was washed away, while the change in the irrigation system because of the road construction flooded out Sector 2. As Maj Gasparotto noted, “Had it not been for the Badgers we would have lost Summit.” The AEVs were kept busy shoring up the strong points with their dozer blades and hydraulic scoops. By 23 November, the engineers’ estimated completion date would be 11 January 2007.¹⁶⁶ In fact, paving would not be completed until March 2007 and the bridge would not be finished until fall of that year.

FOB Martello Redux: October 2006

TF 3-06 could not, however, ignore its other tasks. Consequently B Company and attachments was sent back up to FOB Martello to resume operations in Shah Wali Kot. With all of the focus on Route Summit, however, B Company went into what Maj Abthorpe called “a sixty-day information void.” Nobody knew what was going on in the district. The intelligence world was “sympathetic, but [they] said they only had so much horsepower and was all being focused on Panjwayi.” The Dutch, who had taken over Martello during MEDUSA, had been hit several times and had not patrolled out of the forward operating base. Left to their own devices, Maj Abthorpe and his men reverted back to the counterinsurgency operations they trained for and rebuilt their knowledge base through aggressive patrolling and local contact. A CIMIC team from the PRT arrived and started local projects, including generator repair. Outreach to the local ‘police’ resulted in joint random vehicle checkpoints on the Tarinkot road. With limited resources, however (there were only two platoons, and one was attached to the PRT until the reinforcing force protection company arrived in December), B Company was only able to extend its influence to the community of El Bak instead of into the surrounding valleys or into Mianishin district.

There was, however, still an insurgent presence in Shah Wali Kot: rockets and mortars rained down on the forward operating base daily. With the lack of intelligence access and capability, B Company developed local sources as best they could. Lacking electronic warfare or signal intelligence equipment, they disassembled humanitarian handout radios, borrowed and modified some antennas, and built improvised SIGINT collectors that reached out about 25 kilometres; using this system, B Company was able to map enemy activity in the area.¹⁶⁷

Employing its sources, B Company identified several categories of enemy, which numbered about 150 personnel. The first group consisted of locals who were being harassed by the ‘police’, organized, and and took up arms against them as part of a Pashtunwali blood feud. Then there were agitators from elsewhere in Kandahar who showed up from time to time to egg them on. The more seasoned fighters from further south sometimes came up north to ‘relax’ and worked with the locals or operated on their own. Enemy activity in the district was coordinated with actions further south. When the insurgent commanders in Zharey and Panjwayi needed the pressure taken off, “they would send up a couple of dudes, organize a motley crew, hit us, and bugger off back down [south].”¹⁶⁸

Attacks against Martello usually involved a mortar, which had a fire controller and a crew. After several days of sporadic bombardment, B Company patrols finally apprehended a mortar fire controller on a ridge. After tactical questioning, the Canadians learned that “he had been trained in the Pakistan Army and left [them] to join the fight across the border.”¹⁶⁹ The local elders arrived pleading for his return, frightened of possible retribution by the Taliban. He was sent south to KAF.

In time, a deal was cut between TF 3-06, Regional Command (South) and TF-31. ODA 336 arrived at FOB Martello with orders to cooperate with B Company. B Company got its third platoon back from the PRT. This allowed for greater operational tempo in the district.

ODA 336 with its intelligence resources compared their enemy trace with B Company's – and it was identical. The ODA intelligence sergeant confirmed that there was a training camp in an adjacent valley with about 50 enemy insurgents in it, in addition to the estimated 150 other fighters in the area. A plan was drawn up to raid the camp and exploit it. Under the new rules of engagement established by the incoming Dutch commander of Regional Command (South), the coalition forces at FOB Martello could not just rain speculative fire onto the training camp. The ODA commander declared a Troops in Contact or TIC event just as he and his forces were departing Martello to do the raid. While the raid was in progress, the coalition forces contributed a Village Medical Outreach in the communities adjacent to the forward operating base.

The ODA came back from the training camp raid with information that confirmed connections between the police in Khakrez district and the insurgent forces in Shah Wali Kot. No connection was found between those police and the local 'police,' who were seen as competitors. It appeared as though the Taliban-sympathetic police in Khakrez and the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot were aligned in common cause against the Shah Wali Kot 'police.' Before anything could really be done about the situation, B Company was ordered to turn over FOB Martello to a private security firm. B Company and ODA 336 headed south at the end of November.

The new incoming Regional Command (South) made the decision to withdraw Canadian troops from Shah Wali Kot at this point. This district lay outside the ADZ and was no longer a priority. The Confidence in Government plan, dormant since summer 2006, was now abandoned. It is accurate to assert that FOB Martello served its purpose in 2006 by facilitating the Dutch deployment to Oruzgan but the decision to jettison the stabilization and reconstruction work conducted by the PRT, TF Gun Devils and TF Orion remains questionable. Enemy influence in Shah Wali Kot grew and had detrimental effects on later TF Kandahar operations in 2007 and 2008.

Panjwayi District: September-October 2006

Coalition dispositions in western Panjwayi district included a kandak headquarters plus an Afghan infantry company and its associated U.S. Special Forces ODA. The objective was to transition control of Sperwan Ghar to TF Grizzly. A Company from 2-4 Infantry, a pair of ODAs, an Afghan kandak and an additional Afghan infantry company were operating in what was now called Area of Operation Grizzly. These forces were withdrawn on 21 September.¹⁷⁰ (See Figure 11-11)

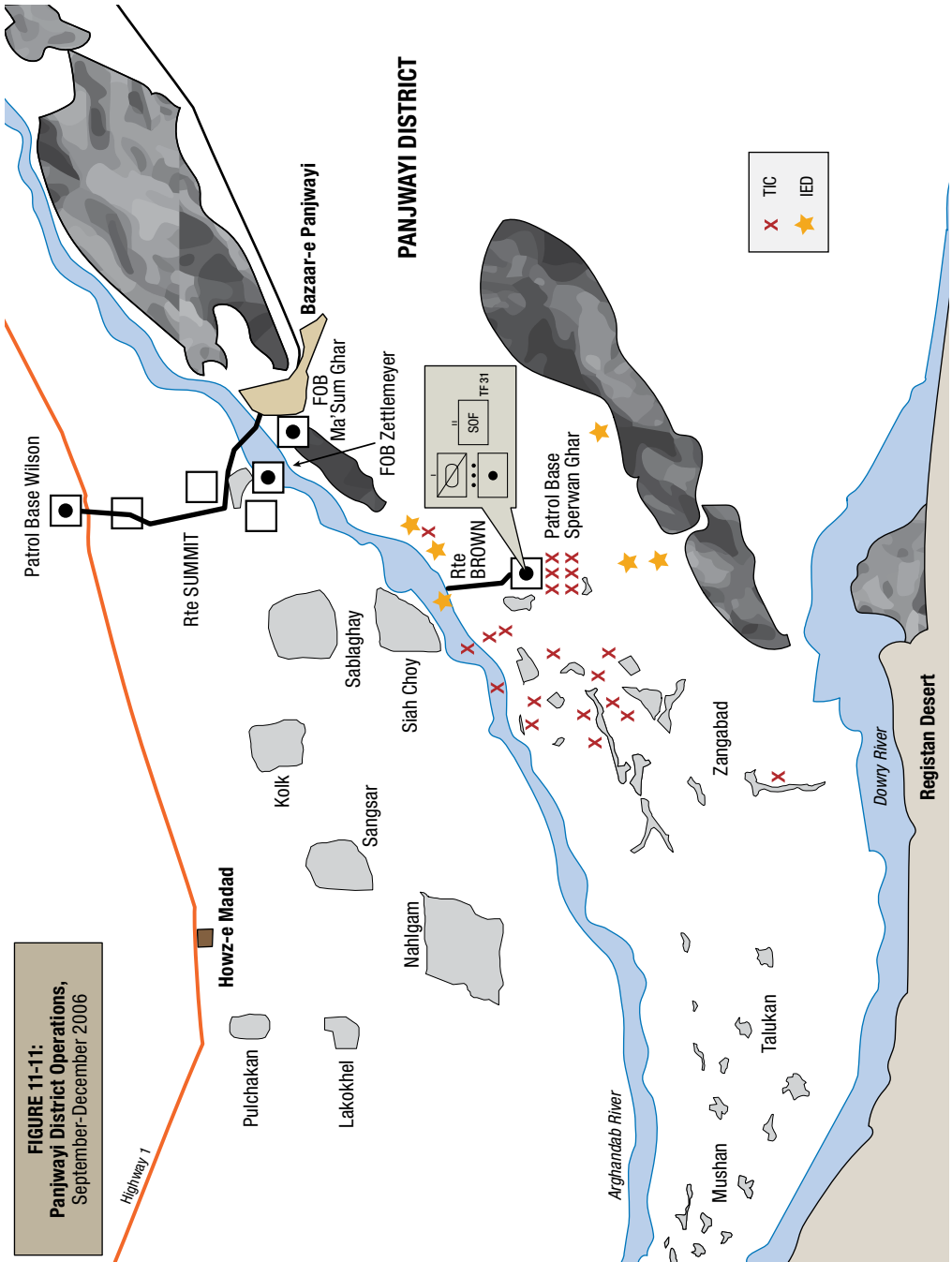


Figure 11-11: Panjwayi District Operations, September-December 2006

TF 31 returned to the area and conducted operations against any and all targets in the immediate vicinity. Sperwan Ghar now endured daily mortar strikes.¹⁷¹ In due course, E Battery deployed two of its M-777 guns and 81mm mortars to what was now called Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, which was later bolstered by Canadian snipers, a Canadian joint terminal attack controller, an Afghan infantry company and three U.S. Special Forces ODAs (which rotated). The Afghan company was an aggressive and confident organization trained by U.S. Rangers. A Royal Marines ETT later joined them with another Afghan company.¹⁷² Maj Lussier's ISTAR Squadron then moved to Sperwan Ghar after Charles Company rotated onto the Summit line in October.

A combat engineer detachment from 23 Field Squadron arrived with a civilian backhoe and started to dig in those forces. HESCO bastion arrived to further fortify the positions as the insurgents employed mortars and airburst RPGs on a daily basis. The American ODA with the Afghan company alternately mounted foot patrols to the west or vehicle patrols to the north in order to generate contacts. The issue here was that the Canadians were ISAF, and the Americans were Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. There was no deliberate operational plan as per ISAF operating instructions but the Canadians responded to extract the Americans when necessary.¹⁷³

Eventually, the Coyote sensors were used to cue the special forces and their Afghans. On one occasion, a special forces patrol probed into Zangabad market. Insurgents poured out of nowhere and the fight was on. Close air support, aviation and artillery were brought to bear with the assistance of the Coyote crews based in Sperwan Ghar. This action lasted nine hours: the Dragoons watched the enemy on their monitors run from building to building trying to escape the JDAMS and Guided Bomb Units delivered by aircraft from the carrier USS Eisenhower. The Afghan troops, using their Icoms, could hear the enemy "wailing and crying" on the means because of the large number of casualties, so they taunted them over the radios for psychological effect. In the middle of the fight, a previously unknown American callsign called Maj Lussier on the Canadian squadron net:

"How y'all doing?"

"Killing Taliban. Who are you?"

"[designation]"

"You bringing anything to the fight?"

"Just keep up the good work!"

It appeared this was a system operator from the 'Other Government Agency' observing the fight from on high and wanted to pay his compliments. Special forces patrols later discovered four casualty collection points with enemy dead and piles of body parts.

In the end, 85 enemy fighters were confirmed killed as well as four of their commanders. None of them were from Afghanistan.¹⁷⁴

For the most part, the enemy stayed out of the area east of Sperwan Ghar and seemed to be based in Zangabad, which, it turned out, was more of an insurgent hotspot than had previously been understood. There were numerous contacts to the west of the patrol base. Canadian engineers were brought in to improve the track that ran from Sperwan Ghar to the rutted east-west dirt road that was now designated Route Fosters, which ran west to Mushan and east to Bazaar-e Panjwayi and then to Kandahar. Contractors dumped gravel but then were harassed with IEDs. When U.S. Special Forces Sergeant 1st Class William Brown was killed in an IED attack, the road from Sperwan Ghar to Fosters was designated Route Brown. Badger AEVs, covered by Leopard tanks, came in to plow a road and destroy buildings on either side of it.¹⁷⁵

With the vegetation dying in fall, there was better observation—and thus more opportunities to bring fires down on insurgent movements when they were observed from Coyote vehicles using their mast-mounted sensors. Wadis that had been covered with trees were now ‘zipped open’ and were exposed as logistics transit routes. ISTAR Squadron even observed an enemy relief in place, with the insurgents maintaining complete radio silence throughout. The insurgents operating in western Panjwayi wore mixed dress, and some wore Afghan National Army battle dress uniform pants with T-shirts and chest rigs. All looked fit. These were not local farmers. Some of the insurgents were even tall Caucasians. They employed fire control and were tactically oriented, with no ‘spray and pray’ behaviour.¹⁷⁶

The coalition forces at Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar had an almost uncountable number of TICs throughout October and into November. The environment was so target rich that departing special forces patrols would call in a TIC report on leaving the base so that the close support was on station by the time the shooting actually started. Coyotes and LAV IIIs from ISTAR Squadron responded to support these patrols on a daily basis. In one three-day period, the Squadron went through 145 boxes of 25mm ammunition.¹⁷⁷

On the night of 24 October 2006, a Coyote crew spotted enemy movement around a compound complex and called in 81mm mortars from E Battery. A U.S. joint terminal attack controller then brought a B-1B bomber on station, which proceeded to unload four 2 000-pound bombs. Then an AC-130 gunship arrived and took out fleeing enemy personnel.¹⁷⁸ At the time, this was not considered an overly significant TIC event. However, when the Canadians transitioned out of Regional Command (South) HQ and the Dutch took over, furious elders from Panjwayi emerged and complained that 60 civilians had been killed. This was the first complaint about alleged civilian casualties during the course of TF 3-06’s operations. The complaint went all the way to Kabul and dragged in the Karzai Government and ISAF HQ, which in turn resulted in an investigation. TF 3-06 was finally

cleared of any wrongdoing and there was no evidence of any civilian deaths, let alone 60, but the perception that Canadians were applying too much firepower was enhanced both in Kabul and in Kandahar circles, and particularly with incoming Regional Command (South) commander, Maj Gen Ton Van Loon.

A New Attitude: Changes of Command, November 2006

Maj Gen Ton Van Loon and his staff replaced BGen Fraser and CTF Aegis on 1 November 2006. As the ‘new broom,’ Van Loon believed that Operation MEDUSA had used too much firepower. As a result, he established tighter control of fires and added more detailed rules of engagement. His view was influenced by what many called the “Dutch Method,”¹⁷⁹ which is best encapsulated by Col Hans van Griensven’s remarks to *The New York Times* that “We’re not here to fight the Taliban. We’re here to make the Taliban irrelevant.”¹⁸⁰ Influenced by the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 and by their operations in Iraq, some of the Dutch commanders interviewed believed that “civilian deaths and property damage...have hardened villager’s attitudes, which helps the insurgents with recruiting, intelligence, and protection.”¹⁸¹ They wanted to place more emphasis on understanding local culture and not offending Afghans, with the belief that this would provide an *entrée* into hearts and minds so the population would support the government.

So what was the “Dutch Method” in practice? It seemed, to many seasoned practitioners from other countries, to consist of “development” before “security.” In Oruzgan province, Dutch forces with incredibly restrictive rules of engagement withdrew when the enemy were present on a regular basis, to the disgust of many Afghan interpreters who thought that was sending the wrong message. The operational focus was on Oruzgan PRT’s activities to curry favour with the Afghan power structure, take pictures of Dutch troops wearing berets instead of helmets while riding bicycles, and ‘make nice’ with the population of Tarinkot, leaving Australian and American SOF to do the dirty work and killing behind the scenes up in the hills. Because those units operated outside the gaze of public scrutiny, their effects were not part of the public equation so it looked to many, particularly those in the Dutch media and Dutch government, like the ‘Dutch Method’ was working. They wanted quick, visible results.¹⁸² Van Loon now wanted to apply the ‘Dutch Method’ to TF Kandahar as well as Regional Command (South). The showcase for this ‘new’ approach would be an operation called BAAZ TSUKA. Associated planning, dubbed Operation SATYR DEUCALION, sought to harness key leader engagements with non-kinetic effects planning.

In more general terms, Van Loon’s planning guidance for Regional Command (South) focused on consolidating the Canadian battle group in Zharey and Panjwayi. Canadians in FOB Martello and Spin Boldak were to move out as soon as possible. TF 3-06 was to shift and support the delivery of security “in and around Kandahar City” in accordance with

another operation, SATYR PYRRHA. Route Summit was to be completed as soon as feasible. And a search was to be made for means to improve the Afghan's security capacity, mostly the police.¹⁸³

The results of LGen Gauthier's command and control discussions with Canadian and ISAF commanders back in September were implemented as policy as Regional Command (South) changed hands. There were several issues in play. First, Regional Command (South) was going to shift from a brigade-sized headquarters to a division-sized headquarters. Second, the main Canadian contributions to ISAF, the battle group, the PRT and the incoming Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT), each needed to be synchronized with NATO ISAF planning. Canada, in his view, needed to get credit for her commitment in NATO circles so it could be leveraged strategically. Commander ISAF Lt Gen Richards agreed with Gauthier and suggested that Canada establish TF Kandahar, led by a brigadier-general, responsible for operations in the province to Regional Command (South) and to the Canadian chain of command.¹⁸⁴

At the same time, there was an increased need to have a Canadian headquarters that could handle PRT and battle group operations as Regional Command (South) shifted to a higher level planning focus. Concurrent with that was the critical need to have a buffer between the tactical forces and the Canadian entities in Ottawa to avoid micromanagement.¹⁸⁵

Previously, BGen Fraser was 'double hatted' as the commander of Canadian forces in Afghanistan and as the coalition Commander, CTF AEGIS/RC (South). Now, under the new structure, everything in Kandahar province reporting to NATO ISAF would now be commanded by the coalition Commander Task Force Kandahar (TFK) who was also the Canadian Commander Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-A), commanding all Canadians in Afghanistan including those remaining in Kabul. Command of RC (South) would now rotate between the Dutch, British, and Canadians on nine-month cycles.

This forced last minute and far-reaching changes. The incoming National Command Element now had to be heavily augmented and then transformed into a brigade headquarters – and someone had to be found to command it. There was little or no time to train this new organization up. The new TF Kandahar/JTF Afghanistan was a conglomeration of reserve augmentees from Land Forces Atlantic Area and the incoming NCE troops, stiffened with experienced operators from Operation APOLLO in key departments. This included people like Maj Alex Watson, who was now responsible for information operations, or LCol Tom Bradley, who determined that there was no operations centre and created the Provincial Operations Centre. BGen Tim Grant was thrown in to lead the organization out of the wilderness and into the promised land of rational command and control.¹⁸⁶

The expanded Canadian headquarters provided critical enablers in four key areas. First, a Fires Cell was incorporated into the structure to coordinate air support, artillery support and rules of engagement authorizations. CTF Aegis's Joint Operations Centre had one for the entire southern provincial area. By giving the Provincial Operations Centre this capability, it permitted the Canadian headquarters quicker access to other nations' air support and the ability to deconflict resources to avoid incidents like the Tarnak Farms tragedy. The second was the creation of a targeting meeting for non-lethal effects like information operations, CIMIC and reconstruction aid. This permitted the headquarters to acquire reconstruction monies and other forms of support to prepare for an operation far in advance rather than at the last minute. This change permitted those effects to be fed into the planning cycle at an earlier stage. Additionally, the Provincial Operations Centre received TUAV and Predator video feeds so the staff could see more or less immediately what was going on. Their predecessors back in the CTF Aegis rotation had to go into a specially compartmentalized back room in the CTF Aegis's Joint Operations Centre or communicate over the telephone to the TF Orion Tactical Operations Centre which was in contact with the American Predator controllers.¹⁸⁷

Finally, the Provincial Operations Centre revitalized the Joint Provincial Coordination Centre (JPCC). TF 3-06 did not accord the JPCC the same level of importance that TF Orion and CTF Aegis did. Grant's new headquarters immediately understood that the JPCC was not only a valuable information collector, it was also an influence tool with the Afghan police and the Governor's Palace. The immediacy of the information, especially information on police operations in the districts and the city, constituted crucial situational awareness. It became, in LCol Bradley's words, "a critical enabler" and was treated as such by the new JTF-A headquarters. Connected to this was the Weekly Security Meeting. This had existed in another form during the CTF Aegis days but, like the JPCC, it was revitalized, drawing in the Afghan security forces leadership more and more in late 2006 and into early 2007. The Weekly Security Meeting increased the probability of gaining more and better information and it also served as a venue for antagonistic organizations to meet and resolve differences under BGen Grant's subtle guidance.¹⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Maj Trevor Cadieu's Leopards arrived at KAF throughout October on board U.S. Air Force C-17s. B Squadron, however, was not immediately launched into the fight. When Maj Gen Van Loon took over and discovered the Canadians were bringing in tanks, he was appalled and informed TF Kandahar that he did not want tanks in a 'counterinsurgency' environment. There were concerns among the members of the new Regional Command (South) headquarters about the possibility of civilian casualties in Kandahar City if the tanks drove through the city on their way to Zharey and Panjwayi.

The new TF Kandahar commander, not *au fait* with the politics and just on the ground, would not deal with Van Loon and pulled the TF 3-06 DCO out of a meeting on the issue. Not a track turned. When LCol Lavoie returned from leave, he went and spoke with Van Loon directly. There had already been high-level intervention by this point, so a deal was made between TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) that the tanks would not drive through the city, that they would take a bypass route west of KAF approved by Regional Command (South). After nearly three weeks of debate, on 22 November, Cadieu led B Squadron out the gate of KAF – and right into an unmarked minefield where his vehicle lost a track in a mine explosion. Plow tanks cleared lanes with the engineers and 12 hours later B Squadron was on its way, after uncovering 50 anti-tank and anti-personnel mines around them.¹⁸⁹

JTF-A/TF Kandahar felt its way toward rationality throughout November 2006. A senior staff member recognized that JTF-A “developed due to a requirement to more closely monitor and influence tactical operations” conducted by Canadian elements (read: the battle group) on behalf of Commander CEFCOM as much as any other reason. But in fact, JTF-A was “neither manned nor equipped” properly to handle that and the myriad of other tasks that seemingly popped out of nowhere.¹⁹⁰ The Provincial Operations Centre formally stood up on 15 December, but it was believed that JTF-A HQ would not assume its full operational capacity until the end of February 2007.

Enter the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team

The virtual absence of the Afghan National Army from the fighting in Kandahar throughout 2006 was troublesome. Yes, part of a kandak from 209 Corps in the north was able to operate at the platoon level in company strength, but it was clearly not enough for the task at hand given the ADZ strategy. The internal coalition competition for Afghan kandaks was fierce and this was magnified by the fact that the U.S. Special Forces had two distinct advantages. First, they had working relationships with Afghans going back to 2001. Second, the U.S. Special Forces were part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, not ISAF. In Canada’s favour, there was substantial representation at the Kabul Military Training Centre and there were other influence tools in Kabul. However, could they be brought together and leveraged to get more Afghans down south to fight? That was unclear in late 2006, but efforts were made by LGen Leslie, who was by now the Chief of Land Staff, to use his previously developed influence with the Afghan leadership while LGen Gauthier applied escalating pressure using progressively higher ranking Canadian politicians on their visits to Kabul.¹⁹¹

Another incremental step was to re-activate the Canadian ETTs but this time under NATO auspices. In ‘NATO-ese’ ETTs were called Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams. The difference was that the OMLTs did not provide logistics support to their

Afghan counterparts; that was, confusingly, the job of the American (and thus Operation ENDURING FREEDOM) forward logistics teams. This move permitted Canadian entry into the NATO bidding process for kandaks.

In any event, the decision was made to activate a Canadian OMLT. Under the command of LCol Jean-Marc Lanthier, 65 members drawn from Royal 22e Régiment battalions in Valcartier formed up in August and deployed in October 2006. The personal relationship between BGen Fraser and the Afghan National Army leadership in Kandahar paid off and the OMLT moved in to work with 2nd Kandak, 1-205 Corps, which was under the command of Lt Col Sherin Shah Kohbandi. LCol Lanthier and his teams worked alongside 2nd Kandak and by Operation BAAZ TSUCKA, the Afghans were back into the fight in Kandahar, though challenges remained on how to integrate an Afghan kandak's planning process with the Canadian battle group's planning process.

Supporting Operations

LCol John Conrad's replacement, LCol Doug LaBrie, arrived more or less in the middle of MEDUSA planning. The new NSE fell onto the same structure that Conrad had to work with, with approximately the same number of personnel: 245. The NSE situation was alleviated somewhat in that the TF 3-06 battle group was not ranging out to Helmand and, over time, FOB Martello was reduced, handed off, and then closed. This allowed the NSE to focus on how to support the operation in Zharey and Panjwayi. An NSE Forward was set up at Patrol Base Wilson, where two days of stocks were held and the logistics operations could be better coordinated and controlled. The manoeuvring units held a further two days of supplies in their echelons. Combat logistics patrols protected by the NCE Force Protection Platoon moved back and forth from KAF to Patrol Base Wilson. Maximum use of locally contracted transport (the 'Jingle Trucks') was used for non-military equipment whenever possible. Mobile recovery teams were detached to the battle group, one per company.¹⁹²

When the strong points and forward operating bases were put into Panjwayi and Zharey in October 2006, this increased the pressure on the NSE and the vulnerability of its forces. NSE detachments were established for Ma'Sum Ghar and Sperwan Ghar. The lack of Canadian helicopters meant that all of these facilities, which went from one in August to eight by October, had to be supplied by ground. The enemy recognized this and shifted IED resources to Route Fosters east in order to interfere with the logistics pipeline. It is crucial to note here that the NSE combat logistics patrols had to be very disciplined while transiting Kandahar City. The misuse of force resulting in the death of a civilian could have escalated into rioting, which in turn would have been exploited by the insurgency. During this rotation, NSE patrols had to use 27 escalations of force, that is, fire warning shots directed at vehicles they believed might be laden with IEDs. There were no civilian casualties in any of these incidents.¹⁹³

One particular combat logistics patrol stood out in fall 2006. A patrol travelling from KAF with artillery ammunition was hit with a suicide vehicle-borne IED on Highway 4 just outside Kandahar City. The ‘zoom-boom’ unloading vehicle was destroyed and the trailer it was on was damaged, while four civilians were killed by the blast. The damaged vehicles were deposited at Camp Nathan Smith while the patrol continued on to Patrol Base Wilson. At Wilson, the artillery battery resupply vehicle did not arrive, so half of the patrol moved on to where the M-777 guns were located: in the Dasht northwest of Patrol Base Wilson. Once the patrol returned, the Taliban mortared it. On the way back through the city, the patrol was ambushed with RPGs. A Bison mobile recovery team crew returned fire with a C-9, suppressing the ambush, but the crew commander was shot through the neck. The patrol continued to the entrance of KAF on Highway 4 and then flipped a vehicle into the ditch as it tried to take a tight turn. A mobile repair team eventually handled the recovery as a helicopter evacuated the wounded.¹⁹⁴

LCol LaBrie and his planned replacement for Roto 3, LCol Chuck Mathé, discussed the problems during Mathé’s recce in September 2006. The existing force structure needed to increase by 80 personnel to remain viable. With the incoming force enhancement capabilities, particularly the Leopards and Badgers plus the additional infantry company’s LAV IIIs, a further 95 support personnel would be needed to keep the battle group and PRT operational.¹⁹⁵

These requirements were not fully addressed in late 2006 but had an impact on the Roto 3 NSE. LCol LaBrie was, however, successful in getting Ottawa to replace the worn out battle group vehicles, on a one-to-one basis. TF Orion’s venerable but tired LAV IIIs, after some use by TF 3-06, were sent back to Canada via the Intermediate Support Base in Turkey for rebuild while new machines were flown in.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, worn-out semi-armoured HLVW trucks from the previous rotation were replaced with newer upgraded and up-armoured vehicles flown in from Canada. The older HLVW were then used to form the administration company echelon to support the battle group. A new heavy engineer support vehicle was also deployed at this time. These upgrades significantly improved morale in the NSE combat logistics patrol teams.¹⁹⁷

The manpower situation was so bad that LCol LaBrie had to shut down some logistics and support operations at KAF, and deploy those soldiers out on combat logistics patrols and other duties in the forward operating bases. This in turn freed up infantry from having to handle force protection at Patrol Base Wilson and increased the number of ‘effectives’ on operations. There were simply not enough personnel. Eventually Public Works and Government Services Canada sorted out its peacetime glacier-like contracting process and Canadian Forces Contractor Augmentation Program civilian augmentees arrived at KAF to handle stores and certain signals functions. This relieved some of the pressure.¹⁹⁸

The NSE force protection platoon soldiers were mostly reservists who were university students in civilian life. Many did not have a military driving licence prior to deployment training, but in weeks, they were qualified to man the RG-31 escort vehicles. Sortieing from KAF on a daily basis, the combat logistics patrols had to travel along Highway 4 and then pass through Kandahar City before reaching their delivery points west in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. The city seemed like a separate theatre of war in that the threat came from suicide attacks, car bombs and ambushes in built-up urban areas, not mortars and direct fire in a rural setting. These soldiers became the experts at traversing this environment, knowing where to look, knowing what not to shoot at, and how to react in a congested environment. Some of the soldiers from the battle group said that they preferred the stand-up fight in Zharey to what the NSE force protection had to do for combat logistics patrol operations. The enemy always knew when the combat logistics patrol was coming: there were only so many ways to get through the city and there were uncountable opportunities for ambushes and IED attacks.¹⁹⁹

The pattern of enemy IED use remained similar to that of the TF Orion days. However, the Canadian counter-IED capability did expand. The existing TF IED Defeat team, which was essentially a Technical Assistance Visit, was augmented in August with a Device Exploitation Team and an electronic countermeasures advisor. They continued the existing relationship with the American TF Paladin and its British equivalents, but then took things one step further by supporting the establishment of the Regional Command (South) Counter-IED Task Force. The counter-IED teams exploited 29 sites and conducted in-theatre training for 2 500 incoming Canadian troops. All of the Canadian IED personnel were grouped together to form the “Counter-IED” organization late in 2006.

Of note, Canada also sent a forensic technician to augment the American IED laboratory at Bagram Air Base. The exploitation teams were able to uncover “bio positive” information on suicide attackers and bomb makers in 63% of the sites exploited (this compared to a 10% standard used by police in Canada).²⁰⁰ This bio information was added into the counter-IED intelligence databases, waiting to be corroborated with other information as part of the larger IED intelligence picture in Afghanistan. From this information came targeting data on IED networks and specific bomb makers.

Finally, and most importantly, the first Detainee Transfer Facility was constructed at KAF. Manned by KAF-based Military Police led by Maj James Fraser, the Detainee Transfer Facility was initially quite rudimentary: tents and barbed wire inside a compound surrounded by logistics storage areas. The existing 2005 Hillier-Wardak agreement remained in place: detainees taken by Canadian units in the field were to be transferred to Afghan authorities as soon as feasible. There were doctrinal challenges, however. The Canadian Army had not really taken prisoners since the Korean War. Peacekeeping operations contributed to this mindset, though

Military Police during the Cold War did have prisoner handling doctrine. The issue here was that the Canadian Army was in effect aiding the Government of Afghanistan and dealing with what were, ostensibly at least, internal insurgents and not technically prisoners of war. The legal complications of this situation challenged the whole Canadian system over the course of the next year.²⁰¹

Operations in November 2006

TF 3-06 continued to work on the road, man the strong points and forward operating bases, and the NSE continued to sustain them while small bands of insurgents regularly emptied the magazines of their small arms at soldiers from all three organizations. Combat logistics patrols were on the receiving end of IED attacks on several occasions. A suicide IED wounded two Canadians and killed two civilians at the “Golden Arches” on Highway 4. Even E Battery lost an HLVW truck to a pressure-plate IED, with two more Canadians wounded. An RCR patrol sortieing from Strong Point North to clear a grape drying hut suffered a mine strike, with two seriously wounded. Over near Sperwan Ghar, the situation had quieted down but in late November, there was resumed enemy activity. A TF 31/ISTAR patrol ambushed a pair of insurgents and then, using known Taliban radio frequencies, requested urgent reinforcements in Pashto. As the enemy numbers grew, a Coyote QRF deployed to hit them, while E Battery dropped 81mm mortar rounds. An A-10 joined the fight with four 500-pound bombs. There were 35 confirmed enemy dead. While the battle damage was under assessment, another enemy force arrived and a prolonged TIC began. Maj Lussier’s Coyotes formed the firebase for the TF 31 manoeuvre, and the mortars and A-10s engaged what was assessed to be a platoon-sized force. A running battle developed as the insurgents tried to escape south and they were engaged on several occasions until destroyed.²⁰²

Tragically, 1 RCR lost its Regimental Sergeant Major on 27 November 2006. CWO Bobby Girouard and his driver, Cpl Albert Storm, were both killed when their Bison armoured personnel carrier was attacked by a suicide vehicle-borne IED early in the morning on Highway 4. These killings were a severe psychological body blow to a task force that had already taken 16 dead and nearly 100 wounded. This killing personally affected LCol Lavoie. As a portent, a Combat Logistics Patrol traversing Route FOSTERS east struck an IED, wounding one soldier. This was the first attack of many on this vital main service route.

Canada became involved with an effort to broker peace in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. This was a joint effort between the Regional Command (South), the Canadian NCE, and the PRT. The main Afghan leader present was Habibullah Jan, with the meetings held at the Sherzai compound instead of the Governor’s Palace. The Zharey elders presented

their policy: they wanted the Taliban to leave Zharey; they wanted ISAF to stop causing destruction in the district; local Taliban should stack arms and help rebuild the community; and all Afghan police and army checkpoints should leave the district, though the ones on Highway 1 could remain. Furthermore, they wanted to elect the district leader and chief of police democratically. They would provide people for security. Most importantly, the elders wanted ISAF to talk to them directly so they could assist in rectifying any problems. The coalition response was that the local Taliban had to join the PTS amnesty program and that ANAP training be done for the local security people. Once ISAF was happy that the auxiliary police were doing their jobs effectively, then reconstruction contractors would be allowed to move in. The elders agreed to take this back to the people.²⁰³

During a follow-up meeting on 25 November, the Panjwayi elders essentially repeated the same policy, with Habibullah Jan present. It seemed to the Canadian participants that Jan was pushing for a Kandahar equivalent to the controversial Musa Qala agreement, which the British brokered in Helmand. In that case, the British agreed to leave the area if the Afghans policed it themselves but as it turned out, it became a safe haven for insurgents who would blow the British up and then retreat to Musa Qala where they were not subject to attack, nor were they 'policed' by the Afghans.

During these discussions, the ISAF participants wanted Ahmad Wali Karzai involved in the discussions, but it emerged from the elders that they did not trust Ahmad Wali Karzai and Canadian personnel recognized there was a split between him and Habibullah Jan. When all was said and done, the ISAF representatives stated that no agreement could really be reached without the participation of the Governor or the leader of the Provincial Council. Indeed, further discussions risked alienating Karzai and Khalid.²⁰⁴

At the end of these meetings, Raziq Sherzai told the ISAF and Canadian participants he believed that "Ahmad Wali Karzai is attempting to prevent contact between ISAF and local people in the region west of Kandahar, and that he is actively working to prevent a cessation of hostilities in the region."²⁰⁵ When the idea of having a larger shura to deal with Zharey and Panjwayi with Ahmad Wali Karzai and Habibullah Jan's participation was raised with the Governor, Khalid stated that "he doubted Habibullah Jan would attend. He stated emphatically that he [Khalid] did not work for Ahmad Wali Karzai and appeared to take offense at the apparent suggestion." The PRT was able to glean that there was a "rift between Ahmad Wali Karzai and Habibullah Jan, which has split the bulk of Kandahar notables in half."²⁰⁶ It was unclear to the Canadians exactly what that rift was over, but it interfered with any resolution of the Zharey and Panjwayi problem.

Operation BAAZ TSUKA: December 2006-January 2007

According to officers in the new Regional Command (South) HQ, Maj Gen Van Loon was unhappy with the level of violence used during MEDUSA and this became a shaping event for him. He viewed MEDUSA as incomplete and, in search of a large operation to get the moving parts working again, Operation MEDUSA Phase 4 evolved into Operation BAAZ TSUKA ('Falcon's Summit'), an operation that would ultimately carry over as Canadian task forces rotated in January-February 2007. BAAZ TSUKA was designed to establish the Kandahar ADZ. The operating principles for the new operation revolved around key leader engagements, information operations and psychological operations all with the objective of influencing without necessarily killing people with massed artillery and close air support. Van Loon wanted to dictate the pace of operations at the Regional Command (South) level throughout this area of operations and not allow it to devolve to the national battle group or task force level.²⁰⁷

At the same time, and in contrast with BGen Fraser's belief in the decreasing effectiveness of special operations forces' kill/capture operations during his time, Van Loon introduced a more sophisticated leadership targeting process at Regional Command (South) headquarters. This stemmed from his interest in link analysis between the "tribals," "narcos" and other players. A lot of effort was put into determining the effects of removing certain players, who could be "touched" and who should not be. Very high-level link analysis was done to deconflict Regional Command (South) SOF targeting with non-ISAF SOF organizations. A special target fusion cell was formed to do this as many of the same personalities appeared on both lists. In the future, each large-scale operation would have a target set to be deconflicted – there would be no more superimposition of American Tier 1 SOF into the battlespace in the middle of these operations – at least in theory.²⁰⁸

BAAZ TSUKA was structured to "avoid Taliban strengths and focus on information operations supported by manoeuvre." The idea was that "have nots" in what Regional Command (South) simplistically called "the Ghilzai tribe" in Zharey and Panjwayi were apparently the target audience of the plan. Van Loon's Regional Command (South) staff believed that there were two "tiers" of Taliban: a hard core, which was not necessarily from the area, and local Taliban. They believed that a series of manoeuvres coupled with selective removal by special operations forces of some key enemy leaders would generate pressure to cause local Taliban leaders to demand that the hard core leave the districts. A combination of humanitarian aid, police and governance would descend on the districts and extend the Program Takhim-e Sohl hand of friendship. Regional Command (South) planners optimistically believed that "Upon completion of the operation, Canadian forces would still be required in the region until sufficient local ANAP are recruited to provide security." Then the Canadians could go home.²⁰⁹

Authorities in Ottawa were watching carefully as BAAZ TSUKA evolved in late November–early December 2006. NATO had its annual high-level meetings, this time in Riga, and Canada was pushing hard for more NATO members to participate in southern Afghanistan. None was forthcoming. Alliance observer Nile Gardiner put the frustrations of the day most cogently:

Germany, France, Turkey, Italy, and Spain have all rejected calls to send their own soldiers to support British, Canadian, and Dutch forces in the south, on the grounds that the situation is too dangerous and that they are “overstretched.” Only Poland has stepped forward.... Many major European Union countries are deploying militarily neutered forces in Afghanistan, commanded by lackluster political leaders petrified of the public reaction to troop casualties, and refusing to redeploy their soldiers to the south for military operations against the Taliban. This is a sorry spectacle that makes a mockery of Europe’s professed commitment to the war on terrorism. NATO is a war-fighting alliance, not a glorified peacekeeping group.²¹⁰

Ottawa’s concerns now regarding BAAZ TSUKA were: a) casualties; and b) whether Canadian commanders thought there was too much use of Canadian troops by others who refused to do the ‘heavy lifting.’ The message to JTF-A was clear: do not get decisively engaged on any front.²¹¹

Operation BAAZ TSUKA was protracted and consisted of many phases and too many sub-phases. Shape, Dislocate and Consolidate were the main phases. “Dislocate” had four sub-phases: Interdict, Disrupt, Secure and Envelop. Each sub-phase was farmed out to a separate task force or sub-unit. Broadly put, a British company would screen to the west, while TF 31 conducted a demonstration of capability at Zangabad Ghar. TF 3-06 would push down Highway 1 and secure Howz-e Madad, while a Dutch airmobile company would conduct an air assault over the entire span of Zharey district. (See Figure 11-12)

In Phase 3, in iterations a, b, and c, governance and security would be pushed into the whole district.²¹² TF 31 proposed what it called a “Consolidation Plan” for both Zharey district and western Panjwayi district. This proposal involved the establishment of Afghan National Army and police checkpoints in key communities and road junctions in both areas.²¹³ (See Figure 11-13)

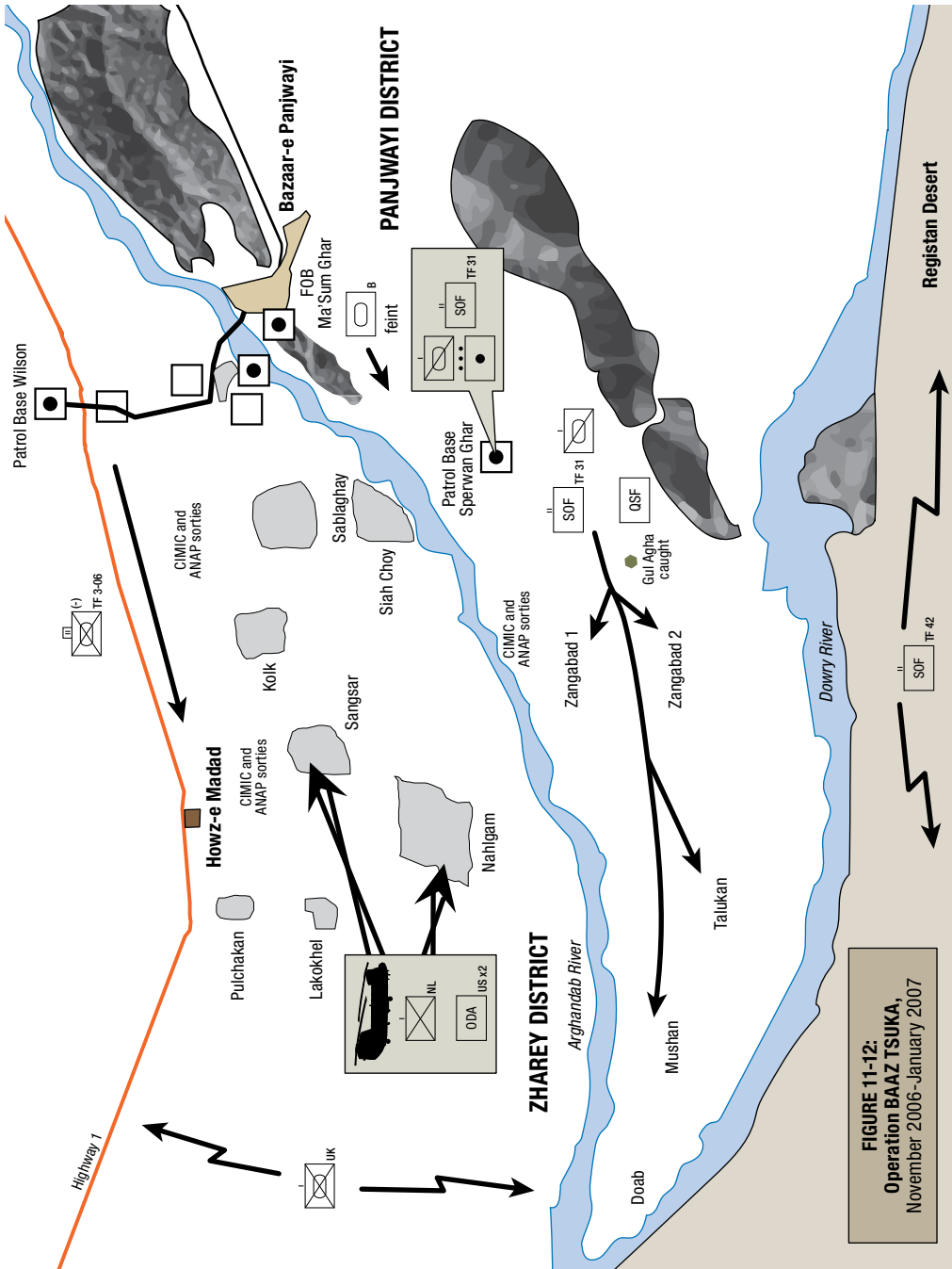


FIGURE 11-12:
Operation BAAZ TSUKA,
 November 2006-January 2007

Figure 11-12: Operation BAAZ TSUKA, November 2006-January 2007

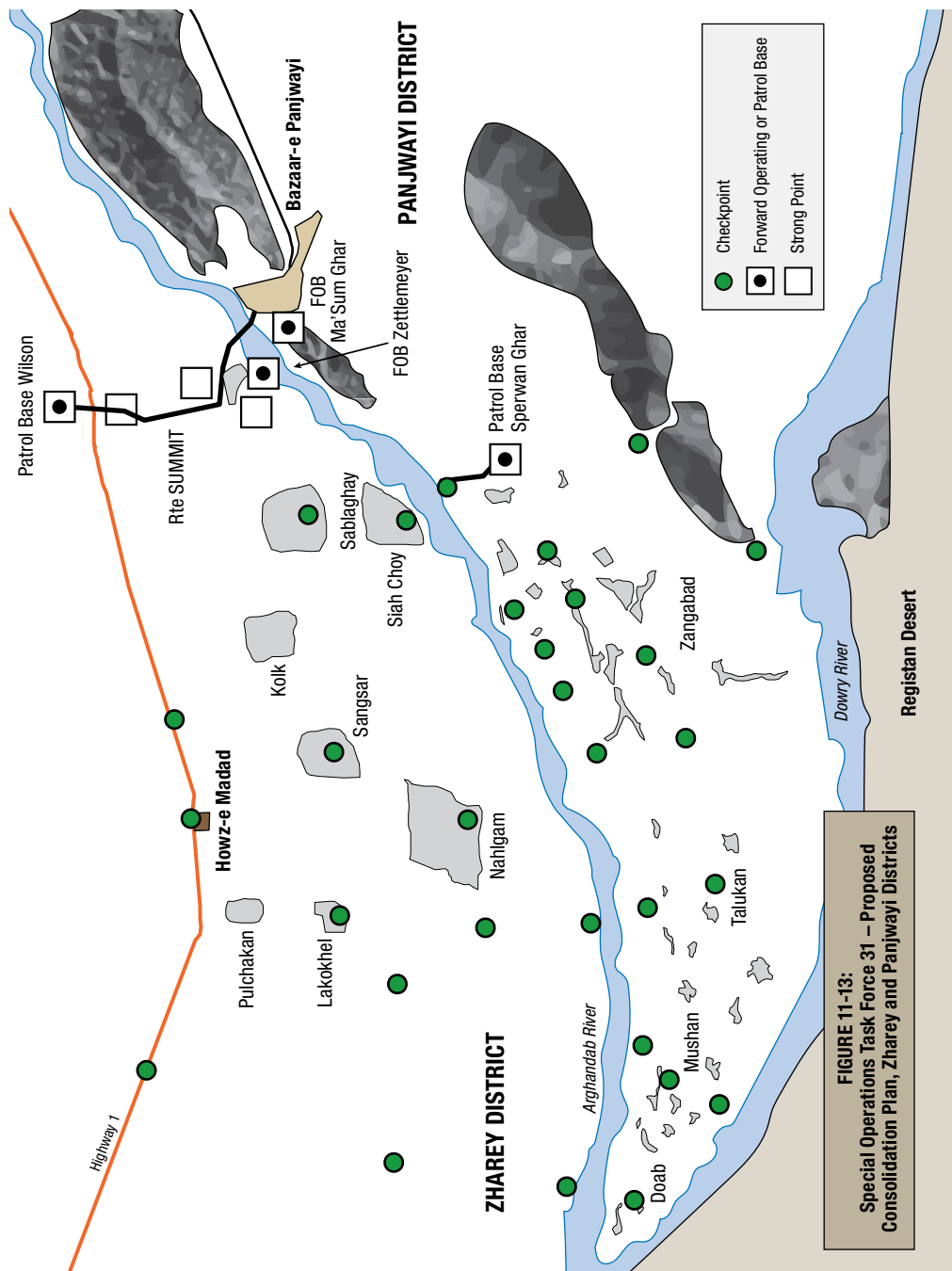


Figure 11-13: Special Operations Task Force 31 – Proposed Consolidation Plan, Zharey and Panjwayi Districts

Regional Command (South) assessed the enemy at this time as consisting of 400 to 600 fighters deployed in an arc from Sangsar, Siah Choy, Zangabad Ghar and Zangabad, with a command node in Nahlgam and a logistics node in Band-e Timor. An early warning system was assessed to exist forward of this arc.²¹⁴

TF 3-06 focused almost solely on the bazaar town of Howz-e Madad on Highway 1. Home to Abdul Khaliq, a Taliban personality in Zharey district, clearing and holding Howz-e Madad would facilitate security on Highway 1, and pose a threat to Sangsar, one of Mullah Omar's purported family homes (the other was in Deh Rawod in Oruzgan province) and its pro-Taliban 'heavy mob.' The tanks would feint out of Ma'Sum Ghar down Fosters toward Zangabad Ghar, while the rest of the battle group with the Afghan National Army and ANAP in tow would set up a perimeter around Howz-e Madad. The Afghan National Army and ANAP would cordon and search, bring in LCol Hetherington's CIMIC teams and aid from the PRT, and leave a police presence behind. In the Phase 3 operations, TF 3-06 would man the Summit forward operating bases and strong points. Six "boxes" would be established between Route Summit and the 'arc' of enemy base towns. A company plus an Afghan company working with the PRT would sortie into these boxes and, if there were enough police and army resources, clear and secure them.²¹⁵

While the planners were working out BAAZ TSUKA, the enemy noticed vulnerabilities in the coalition dispositions and went to work. Correctly identifying that Route Fosters was TF 3-06 and TF 31's main service route, three IED strikes were conducted against combat logistics patrols from 4 to 6 December. One of these resulted in four Canadian wounded.²¹⁶

There were more refinements to the plan. TF 42, the British SOF task force, was now responsible for interdicting the Panjwayi-Reg Desert boundary. The Americans pledged the continued use of TF 31. In this case four ODAs, each with an Afghan infantry company, would operate from Sperwan Ghar west along the horn of Panjwayi and seize it.²¹⁷

Operation BAAZ TSUKA's manoeuvre went according to plan. All of the moves dictated by the plan occurred: A British company moved into the Maywand/Zharey district boundary area. The tanks conducted a feint and then headed with the combined Canadian-Afghan force for Howz-e Madad and secured it. TF 31 rapidly moved out and seized Mushan, Talukan 1, Zangabad-2 and Zangabad-1 each with an ODA and an Afghan infantry company. Zangabad Ghar was taken with an ODA. ISTAR Squadron supported these operations with snipers and Coyotes. The Dutch Airmobile Company and two TF-31 ODAs assaulted Nahlgam and Sangsar. TF 3-06 sucked back to the SUMMIT strong points and prepared to mount operations into the boxes to the west and clear them.

During the course of these manoeuvres, however, there was very little contact. An estimated 38 insurgents were targeted and engaged over the course of three days. What was interesting and useful, however, was the elimination of three Taliban leadership targets:

Haji Mullah Sahib, Gul Agha and Mullah Sher Jan. ISTAR Squadron sub-units and TF 31 operators observed the arrival of the “Qandahar Security Force” and its OGA mentors on the battlefield in unmarked Mi-17 helicopters and sports utility vehicles into Zangabad shortly before TF 31 and ISTAR Squadron stepped off to move west.²¹⁸ Gul Agha was a significant “money man” to the Taliban, a key financier. One analysis suggested that when those three were eliminated, the Zharey and Panjwayi insurgent structures cached their weapons and went home.²¹⁹

Operation BAAZ TSUKA was a lot of coalition effort to net less than 40 enemy dead. The operation’s legacy was decisive in another way. TF Kandahar, and Regional Command (South) for that matter, now had a series of defended locations to hold in an arc from Howz-e Madad to Patrol Base Wilson, down through the SUMMIT strong points, to Ma’Sum Ghar, to Sperwan Ghar, Zangabad, Talukan and Mushan. What next? According to the plan, local elders activated via key leader engagements and supported with humanitarian assistance were supposed to generate men from their communities to be trained as ANAP. However, only the western part of Zharey was populated, and in the small government-controlled areas, no one was joining the ANAP. Moreover, there was not enough Afghan National Police to handle all of these locations. According to one of his company commanders, LCol Lavoie “was on the phone every night to the G3/5 and the CHOPS, trying to get any kind of police presence in the area.”²²⁰ As for eastern Zharey, there was no substantial resettlement, so the effects that Regional Command (South) and TF Kandahar wanted from reconstruction and security could not be generated.

CEFCOM’s assessment of the situation in December 2006 asserted that “The 1 RCR battle group has now been forced into a defensive posture with a force structure that restricts operations to other parts of the area of operations.” This was a direct result of the Afghan National Army “showing only modest progress” and the Afghan National Police “abandoning its supporting role on Route Summit.”²²¹ Canada and its partners were now fixed in place in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. There was little or no reconstruction work being done in almost all of Kandahar’s districts, let alone the districts that were supposed to be part of the ADZ.

By early December 2006, B Squadron was ensconced at the now growing FOB Ma’Sum Ghar. “MSG,” as it was colloquially designated, took the original compound complex in the flat area, and built around it. 23 Field Squadron bulldozed tank run-ups all over the Ghar and constructed bunkers for the Afghan National Army on the high features. The Artillery world flew in a HALO counter-bombardment system, and its antennas joined the multitude of communications systems sprouting up. The NSE moved a detachment in, followed by ‘Tango Maintenance,’ the electrical and mechanical engineers responsible for

the Leopard tanks and Badger AEVs. Ma'Sum Ghar was becoming a stationary battleship of sorts, in the middle of Zharey and Panjwayi district, with towers and turrets pointing in every direction. The forward operating base attracted its share of enemy attention – this time 107mm rockets similar to those lofted at KAF, plus mortars and small-arms fire.

B Squadron had three troops of Leopard C-2 tanks armed with 105mm guns. The C-2 variant also had night-fighting equipment. In the run-up positions, the Leopards could shoot at any target out to two kilometres. Starting on 3 December, a 107mm rocket team was engaged and destroyed by one of the tanks. The flat trajectory of the 105mm high-explosive anti-tank round made it extremely accurate. A week later, an 82mm mortar opened up on Ma'Sum Ghar: it was also dispatched with 105mm fire. Maj Cadieu's armoured soldiers, working with their Recce and Artillery colleagues, developed tactics whereby direct fire would take out the target, and artillery would be called in to cut off and destroy enemy fighters that dispersed or escaped the first shot. Local insurgents became wary moving around Ma'Sum Ghar.²²²

Enemy objectives changed and they moved to take on the Summit strong points yet again. From 7 to 11 December, the insurgents mounted three separate attacks. In all three attacks, B Squadron had either a troop present at a strong point or a troop in a run-up position providing support to B Company. An insurgent platoon went after Strong Points North and Centre: 105mm fire took out 12 enemy fighters. An RPG volley against Strong Point West on 9 December resulted in two enemy RPG gunners killed. In an assault on an Afghan National Army checkpoint on Summit, another enemy anti-tank team was dispatched with tank fire.²²³ (See Figure 11-14)

That did not stop the insurgency, however. Shifting tactics, the enemy mounted a major attack on Strong Point West on the night of 29 December. Strong Point West dominated the Pashmul area, particularly the cemetery area that the insurgency used as a rally point going back to July 2006. B Company regularly put out clearance patrols from the strong points and encountered handfuls of returnees, which B Company was sure had a high proportion of insurgents. That evening, a LAV III crew in a run-up position saw a group of men unpacking a large object in a building adjacent to the strong point. Because of restrictive rules of engagement, B Company could not engage them until the object fired an 82mm high-explosive anti-tank round at hull-down LAV III and three machine guns opened up on the Canadian position. Maj Abthorpe detected 20 insurgents moving into an adjacent grape field, preparing to assault. An enemy anti-tank weapon took out the LAV III turret, rendering it inoperative but not killing the crew.²²⁴

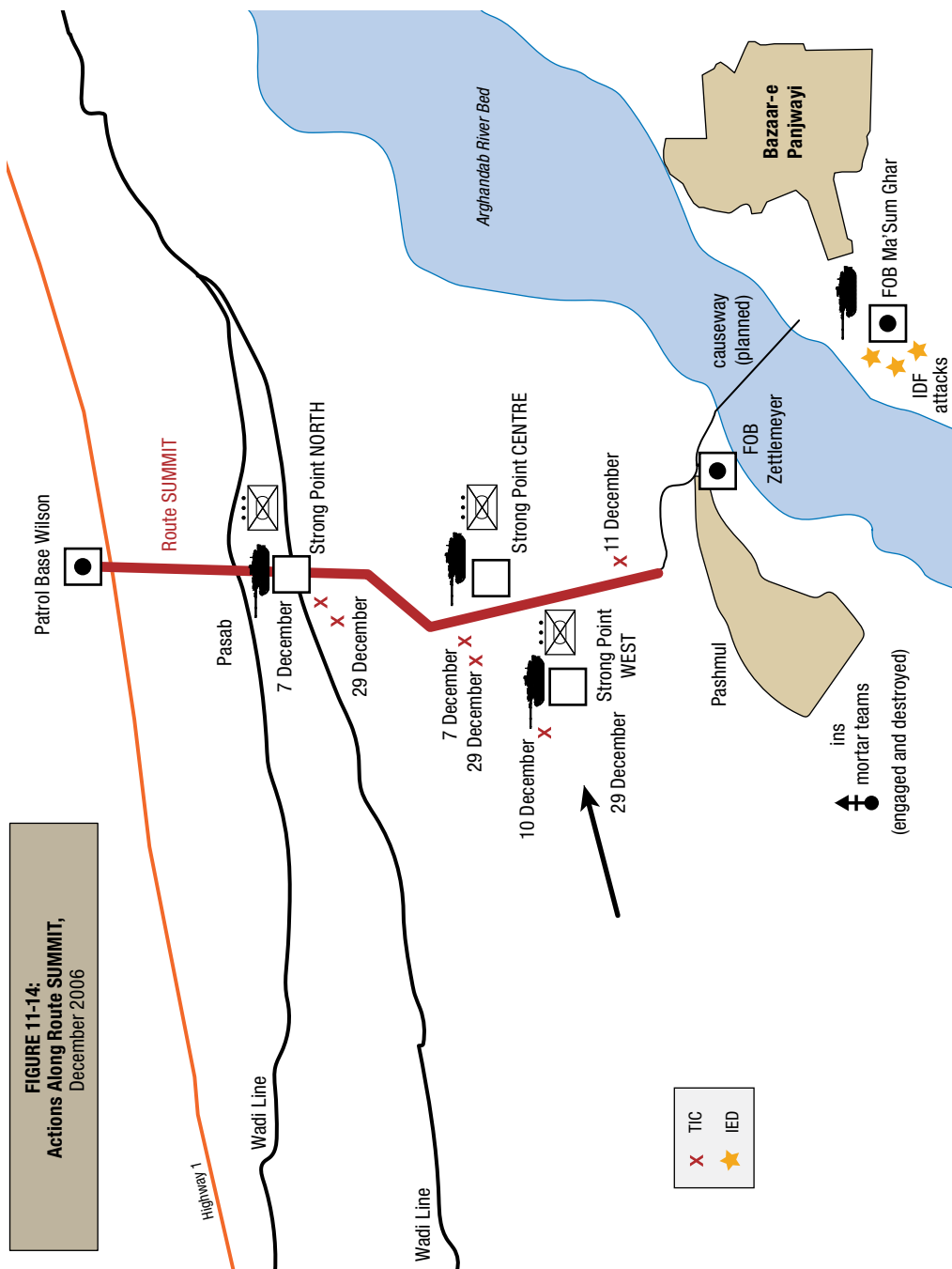


Figure 11-14: Operations in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, December 2006

Up the road, all of the other strong points came under simultaneous, concentrated small-arms fire. Back at Strong Point West, the Company Headquarters LAV IIIs opened up on the enemy assault force while the platoon in the strong point laid down artillery fire from E Battery but a bad correction landed the rounds right next to the strong point – and coincidentally right on enemy fighters that had reached it. The forward observation officer ‘walked’ the fire back to the west, using it to push the enemy back. The firing stopped and Maj Abthorpe prepared to close the TIC; Maj Jay Harvey got on the radio and told him they were watching the action from an MQ-1 Predator and a TUAV. Back at the battle group Tactical Operations Centre, they could see 20 insurgents that had survived the artillery but they could also see two waves of fighters that were rallying behind the cemetery, an estimated 65 to 80 fighters in each wave. B Company’s platoon and headquarters were by this time running low on ammo. The 155mm rounds kept landing while LCol Lavoie ordered Maj Cadieu’s B Squadron into action. Two troops of Leopard C-2s arrived from Ma’Sum Ghar and deployed in a ‘ring of steel’ around Strong Point West, killing an estimated nine insurgents.²²⁵

After the battle of Strong Point West, the enemy reverted back to IEDs and small-arms ambushes in Route Summit. TF 3-06 mounted a series of four combat team-sized disrupt operations into early January 2007. Combining the Leopard squadron with an infantry company (sometimes Canadian, sometime Afghan with Canadian OMLT) and Canadian armoured engineers, TF 3-06 secured Howz-e Madad, conducted clearance operations west of Route SUMMIT, raided Siah Choy and secured a location for a British sensitive site exploitation team. These operations used a similar approach. Plow tanks led in open terrain, while Badger AEVs and dozer tanks led in closed terrain to mitigate enemy IED use. The dozer tanks plowed ‘herring bone’ run-ups for the infantry in their LAV IIIs behind the breaching vehicles while the breach was in progress. Infantry cleared suspicious locations. Once the tanks had over-watch around the target area, the infantry and engineers cleared the objective. Then the combat team withdrew by another route.²²⁶ CIMIC was brought in to handle manoeuvre damage claims and that required some form of governance in Zharey district.

Provincial Reconstruction Team Practicalities and Afghan Development Zone

The efforts by the Government of Afghanistan to get the National Solidarity Programme underway in Kandahar Province were overshadowed at this time by the other operations in Zharey and Panjwayi districts. CIDA proved useful in that its personnel were in a position to monitor, at arm’s length, how well the Community Development Councils and District Development Assemblies were taking shape through their contacts with UN Habitat, the implementing partner with the National Solidarity Programme. Indeed, the PRT started to use the number of active CDC’s and DDA’s in the province and especially in contested areas as a measurement of success around this time.

The National Solidarity Programme was active in seven of Kandahar's 17 districts as of November 2006. The number of Community Development Councils and the number of approved projects in each district served as (extremely) rough guides as to progress. Dand, for example, had 133 elected Community Development Councils with 325 approved projects. Panjwayi, on the other hand, had 27 CDCs and 15 approved projects. Projects, in this case, amounted to irrigation canals and dam diversions, drainage, road culverts, power supply, sewing machine distribution, wells, pumps and reservoirs. Almost none of the projects were in any stage of completion, however, because of the lack of money flow through non-existent District Development Assemblies and a moribund Provincial Development Committee. This increasingly caused credibility problems with the local population. The NSP-supported districts were, notably, Maywand, Panjwayi, Zharey, Arghandab, Dand, Daman and Shiga – pretty much the ADZ and along the vital Highway 1 route. The rest were essentially left to fend for themselves.²²⁷

The PRT's main success story in the latter half of 2006 were the connections made with the government, which facilitated the return of the population to parts of Zharey and Panjwayi districts. With the arrival of a consolidated Force Protection Company from the Van Doos battalions in December, the PRT was able to reorganize its CIMIC detachments, as they were no longer dependent on the battle group for protection and security. The Van Doos brought with them two LAV III platoons and a host of RG-31s. This significantly increased mobility and dramatically facilitated PRT operations. It also helped the OGDs relax their severe security restrictions, which in turn facilitated their activities: even Corrections Canada sent a two-man team to assess the Afghan incarceration system. It also freed-up battle group troops for other tasks. Gavin Buchan from DFAIT calculated that the arrival of the Force Protection Company increased the PRT "sortie" rate from two lines of tasking per day to eight and nine lines of tasking per day. The dramatically increased "volume of contact" with Kandahari power brokers was significant in restoring Canadian government influence to pre-Berry assassination levels by January 2007.²²⁸

The PRT's role in Operation BAAZ TSUKA was facilitated by the new capability. CIMIC detachments were able to deliver "Material Assistance" (militarily politically correct language for "Humanitarian Assistance" and reflected the increasingly shrill cries of the non-governmental organization community about respecting "humanitarian space"), in the form of "CIMIC Bombs": these were sea containers with organized loads of tools, food, and so on that could be delivered by 'Jingle Truck' contracted transport or by the NSE to an area that was being re-populated. Another related concept was the "Cop-in-a-Box" where modified and equipped sea containers became the basis for portable and deployable police checkpoints.



Photo Credit: DND IS2006-0388

Provincial Reconstruction Team commander, LCol Simon Hetherington, flanked by Maj Harjit Sajjan and a USAID representative, Ashley Abbott, work with the Panjwayi district shura to mitigate the effects of military operations in the area.

The PRT was able to focus on returnees throughout January 2007. A photo-op with the Governor leading a couple of hundred people back to Sperwan was orchestrated with the re-opening of the Sperwan school, the delivery of ‘Material Assistance’ and the holding of a large shura with local elders: a Village Medical Outreach was also scheduled into events for synergy. Another followed on 10 January in Zangabad, with 200 families. Toward the end of the month, 161 people returned to Pasab in Zharey, and 100 to Musa Khan. For the most part, however, eastern Zharey remained unpopulated.²²⁹

Another overlooked area was Kandahar City, the heart of the ADZ itself. When Maj Gen Van Loon took over in November, he directed that a contingency plan, initially called BAAZ and later BAAZ SATYR, be formulated so he could “refocus attention away from [the] Operation MEDUSA [area of operation] toward what has always been our centre of gravity, the population of the Kandahar ADZ. The effect I want to achieve is that both local and international audiences realize the improved situation [in Kandahar City]....”²³⁰ BAAZ was completely city-centric. Special operations forces would shape in “red” areas, while the PRT, with its incoming force protection company augmented with Dutch PSYOPS, would conduct joint patrols with police. It appeared as though the objective of contingency plan BAAZ was to give the impression of security so that the ADZ could be formally established and a victory declared.

The PRT, however, was unenthusiastic. They were not convinced that enough of the city was pro-government to attempt this information operations stunt and they believed that the Afghan police should be supported with a second-row approach, something that would bolster the better message that Afghans were in charge. In any event, the PRT command structure was not organized to command dismounted patrolling in the city.²³¹

Van Loon then wanted to deploy a Dutch company into the city as an alternative. However, Canadian planners learned that UNAMA, who asserted that there was more enemy control over the city than Canadian assessments claimed, influenced him. Van Loon thought more forces in the city would facilitate development activity. When word got out, the non-governmental organization community, the UN in Kandahar and the deputy governor violently opposed the idea. In their view, it was better to root out terrorists with police and special operations forces rather than getting involved in heavy urban combat which would likely draw in more and more enemy fighters and would produce severe damage to the city and its inhabitants.²³²

With all the manoeuvring west of the city, people forgot there was a problem inside the city itself. Canadian planners noted that Regional Command (South) intelligence people kept cutting and pasting the same generalized data into their briefings time and time again. When the All Source Intelligence Centre did its own analysis, it confirmed that the enemy had expanded their presence in the northern “cone” of the city, the Loy Wala district. Mullahs were more and more vociferous in their stance against ISAF and the government, and this influence spilled into the eastern districts of the city. Loy Wala seemed to be more and more like a “no-go” area, and it fed IED attacks on Highway 1 west of the city, but most importantly, it also supported attacks on Highway 4 to KAF and Highway 1 east to Zabul province.

JTF-A’s analysis led to two projects. First was the idea of a Kandahar City southern bypass, which would permit ISAF forces in KAF to deploy west without going through the city itself. Second was Operation PORTCULLIS. There were four existing checkpoints into the city, basically at the cardinal points. PORTCULLIS proposed 12 police-manned checkpoints covering all of the primary entryways and deployed with some depth, particularly on the eastern approaches which were IED-problematic.

For a variety of reasons, the bypass idea was slow to develop and extremely problematic. It was not until 2011 that the semblance of a bypass was completed. But PORTCULLIS was attractive. The PRT played a key role in its development, mostly because Canadian policing expertise resided there. To make up for German deficiencies in the police capacity development area, Canada was able to deploy three more civilian police advisors to the PRT, which increased the number to five. Their contacts with the Afghan National Police coupled with the relationships established with the government by LCol Hetherington and his staffs were key aspects of shaping the plan.²³³ Keep in mind that attempts had been made as far back as 2005 by the PRT to assess the status of the existing Afghan National Police dispositions and capability.

The idea underlying PORTCULLIS was the previously mentioned ‘Cop-in-a-Box.’ Temporary vehicle checkpoints consisting of HESCO bastion walls and sea containers could readily be put up until more permanent police sub-stations were built. The increased presence in the planned PORTCULLIS locations was deemed critical, particularly on Highway 4, which was scheduled to have four checkpoints.²³⁴ As usual, the issue was the lack of Afghan National Police. With the new emphasis on the ANAP, the pseudo-militia, there was a competition for resources at the regional training centers.

The policing situation in Canadian areas of interest outside the city remained problematic. PRT CIMIC, for example, identified multiple separate, uncoordinated police organizations operating in Zharey district. The Afghan National Police, controlled by a Col Akka, had four checkpoints near Howz-e Madad, two in Senjaray, one at the Zharey district centre, two at internally displaced persons camps north of the highway and another at Maku – all along Highway 1. There was a ‘Highway patrol’ operating from Pasab, also along Highway 1. Another Afghan National Police group operated from FOB Zettelmeyer along Route Summit: they reported to Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri. Habibullah Jan had his own police in Senjaray: they had their own checkpoints in addition to the existing Afghan National Police Highway 1 checkpoints. Yet another Afghan National Police group handled internally displaced persons camp security in Panjwayi, paid for by the Governor. Standby Police Unit 005 or its remnants operated wherever they wanted.²³⁵

General Asmatullah Alizai, the Kandahar provincial chief of police, was supposed to have authority over Akka, and theoretically, over all of these forces. The reality was that the Governor brought Akka and his men in from Zabul province and deployed them to Zharey district. Akka was antagonistic toward Habibullah Jan and his ‘police’ in Senjaray; it generated a certain level of tension, which in turn was exploited by the Taliban and made it difficult for the police to get a grip on Zharey and Panjwayi.²³⁶

While the PRT started the bureaucratic groundwork on PORTCULLIS, the issue remained of how to handle insurgent networks in the city without turning Kandahar City in 2007 into Mogadishu circa 1993. Intelligence data suggested that key enemy commanders from the MEDUSA battles exfiltrated the area and were hiding in Loy Wala. This was not fully addressed by JTF-A at this time, probably because of the focus on the action west of the city while the headquarters was still standing up. For the most part, it was left up to the special operations forces.

In early January 2007, JTF-A established a more refined outlook on Operation SATYR PYRRHA. The planners viewed this as overlapping with Operation BAAZ TSUKA Phase 3. At this point, ISAF HQ intent was to deal with two things: establish the ADZs and keep Highway 1 open through improved security. ISAF decided, contrary to Van Loon’s approach, that security would pre-dominate over development in that security

“set the conditions for long-term reconstruction and development,” not the other way around. TF Kandahar was to “isolate and neutralize destabilizing elements to provide security and enable reconstruction and development.” There were pages and pages of tasks, but within them was the need to develop a plan to control movement through Kandahar City as part of Highway 1 security, which in turn was synergistic with ADZ security.²³⁷

Conclusions

Operation MEDUSA, not surprisingly, took centre stage during fall 2006. It was one of the larger Canadian operations; it was visibly kinetic in execution, and approximated what media and other observers thought a battle should be. It was also a crucial battle in the Canadian strategic perspective. If MEDUSA had failed, the Canadian government would have probably fallen, which in turn would have had substantial effects on the continuance of Canadian presence in Afghanistan. The possibility of a domino effect on a number of already skittish NATO members was very real. When LGen Gauthier had a one-on-one meeting with Lt Gen Richards in Kabul, he was told that if MEDUSA failed, then NATO would fail.²³⁸

Operation MEDUSA did, however, take attention and resources away from reconstruction and development efforts for some time. It also forced Canadian commanders to devote the bulk of their resources to part of a single district, Zharey, while engaging in economy of effort in Panjwayi and Shah Wali Kot districts. Little else was accomplished in the designated ADZ. It was only with the deployment of more forces well into the rotation that mobility was restored to the PRT so it could get out and do its job.

The nature of the enemy threat to Kandahar City, however, demanded a clear and unequivocal ‘kinetic’ operation in that place, at that time. Where TF Orion identified the insurgent problem and bought time with the 3 August Battle vis-à-vis Mullah Naqib and Arghandab district, TF 3-06 reinforced the message that Canada was willing to fight and pay in blood to protect the city and its inhabitants. Collaterally, Operation MEDUSA kept Highway 1 open so that British reinforcements headed to Helmand could continue to deploy and prop up their threatened efforts in that province.

There were, however, unintended effects related to Operation MEDUSA, some negative, and some positive. First, there was internal U.S. Army criticism about the conduct of the operation where MEDUSA was unjustly and derisively referred to as “CANACONDA” behind Canadian backs, which, when this became known, got those backs up, especially the CDS’s. There were other unhealthy expressions of petty nationalism in the printed form from both American and Canadian sources. The nature of the battle, elements of which tended toward the conventional with substantial fire support, established an unofficial competitiveness among some Canadian officers who tried to compare their later operations against the supposed “standard” of MEDUSA. One might as well have compared apples with oranges.

Some post-Operation MEDUSA briefings repeatedly over-used the term “since Korea” which, perhaps, heightened the expectations of some as to what fighting in Afghanistan was all about.

The inevitable quest for the Holy Grail of a ‘decisive battle’ and ‘victory’ by the amateurs, the media, and the politicians found fertile ground in operations like MEDUSA. When the enemy kept fighting, it was easy for the uneducated to label MEDUSA as a failed operation, despite the behind-the-scenes successes in and around Kandahar province. The psychological effects of MEDUSA on the enemy even played out in places as far away as Regional Command (East) where there were significant theatre-level effects. When CJTF-76 re-cocked to go in and clean out the provinces in Regional Command (East) with Operation MOUNTAIN FURY, American intelligence networks learned that insurgent commanders in all three provinces were closely observing events in Kandahar. As far as one Canadian staff officer in Bagram could determine, “All the bad guys saw the amount of combat power coming in and went ‘Fuck THIS!’ put their shit down, walked away and went up into the hills – and nothing happened.”²³⁹

The Regional Command (South) designed – and built – Operation BAAZ TSUKA was, however, a failed operation that had long-term consequences for Canada in Kandahar. BAAZ TSUKA was unable to extend coalition control over Zharey district west of Route SUMMIT, while at the same time the operation over-extended coalition forces into western Panjwayi district. There was simply not enough governance and development horsepower put into those areas to hold them, let alone enough security. The key issue here was the lack of police to maintain security after the military forces departed. When Regional Command (South) went after its Holy Grail in Helmand during Operation ACHILLES (see Volume 2), Canada, or at least the incoming TF 1-07, was left holding the proverbial bag. When all was said and done, however, the soldiers of TF 3-06 and their allies took up the torch passed to them by TF Orion and went the distance against an array of insurgent fighters, both foreign and domestic, and gained more than a measure of success under arduous environmental and political conditions.

ENDNOTES

1. There was no functional equivalent to Operation MEDUSA in the other Regional Commands. The reasons for this relate to terrain and the centrality of Kandahar City as opposed to enemy capability. At no time during 2006 were American units in RC (East) confronted with anything comparable to the scale of the enemy effort in Kandahar province.
2. PRT KLE, “Meeting with Governor Asadullah Khalid re: Southern Security Situation” (17 August 2006).
3. Message American Embassy Kabul to State, “PAG Makes First Recommendations to President Karzai” (21 August 2006).

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4. CTF Aegis briefing to the author (29 June 2006). The author participated in meetings at CTF Aegis where aspects of the concept were debated.
5. Message American Embassy Kabul to State, "PAG Makes First Recommendations to President Karzai" (21 August 2006).
6. Regional Command (South) continued to name itself CTF Aegis well into the fall of 2006.
7. Interview with LGen David Fraser (28 April 2014).
8. Interview with LCol Shane Schreiber (Edmonton, 16 May 2007).
9. "Meeting with Gov. Asadullah Khalid re: Southern Security Situation" (17 August 2006).
10. Interview with LCol Shane Schreiber (Edmonton, 16 May 2007); Interview with Col Brad Booth (Carlisle, 27 August 2008).
11. Fraser interview.
12. Freakley interview.
13. Email Schreiber to dl "Warning Order-Clear Within Sector Highway 1" (9 August 2006).
14. Interview with Col Brad Booth (Carlisle, 27 August 2008).
15. Interview with LCol Harjit Sajjan (Kandahar, 15 March 2009). See also AAR ASIC "Operation MEDUSA Intelligence Points" (n/d). See also Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010), p. 81.
16. Interview with LCol Harjit Sajjan (Kandahar, 15 March 2009).
17. Interview with Lt Col Don Bolduc (Carlisle, August 2008).
18. Fraser interview.
19. Fraser interview.
20. Interview with Col Simon Hetherington (Kandahar, 12 August 2010).
21. Fraser interview.
22. Lavoie interview.
23. Lavoie interview.
24. Lavoie interview.
25. As described in detail in John Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009).
26. Interview with LCol Mark Gasparotto (Kingston, 22 May 2008).
27. Lavoie interview; Conrad, *What the Thunder Said*, pp. 121-124.
28. Lavoie interview.
29. This section is based on a telephone interview with LCol Mike Wright, 4 October 2011 and a follow-on interview conducted at CFB Shilo on 7 May 2013. I would also like to thank Maj Duncan Redburn for his input.
30. Lavoie interview.
31. Wright interviews.
32. Interview with MWO Mike Jackson, (CFB Shilo, 8 May 2013).
33. Interview with Major Mike Reekie, (CFB Shilo, 8 May 2013).

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34. The ratio of 3 wounded for every killed is historically-based for conventional operations and is generally used for planning purposes. In this situation it is impossible to determine the exact figure.
35. Lavoie interview.
36. RC(S) "CTF Aegis Warning Order" (19 August 2006).
37. TF 3-06 "Warning Order 001 to Op MEDUSA" (25 August 2006).
38. One platoon was kept with the PRT for security.
39. Interview with LCol Geoff Abthorpe (Edmonton, 2011).
40. Interview with Major Derek Prohar (Ottawa, 24 October 2012).
41. Rusty Bradley and Kevin Maurer, *Lions of Kandahar: The Story of a Fight Against All Odds* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), Ch. 7-9. See also 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
42. Lipcsey interview.
43. Lavoie interview.
44. RC(S) "Change to FRAGO/Ops 0" (29 August 2006).
45. TF 3-06 "Op MEDUSA 26 August-6 September 2006"; (29 August 2006) RC (S) "Change to FRAGO/Ops 0" (27 August 2006).
46. Hetherington interview.
47. 23 Field Squadron War diary; Abthorpe interview.
48. Bradley and Maurer, *Lions of Kandahar*, pp. 133-136.
49. Ibid.
50. Lavoie interview.
51. Gary M. Bowman, "Operation Medusa: Coalition Operations in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan September 2006."
52. Abthorpe interview.
53. Gasparotto interview.
54. Telephone interview with Major Steve Macbeth (16 January 2011). Telephone interview with Major Andrew Lussier (5 October 2011).
55. Bradley and Maurer, *Lions of Kandahar*.
56. Letter T.J. Grant to COMCEFCOM, "Operation MEDUSA" (n/d).
57. Gasparotto interview.
58. ALLO Maj S.R. Rankin, "TIC-Operation MEDUSA Initial Assault on Pashmore [sic] 3 September 2006 Incident Lessons Report (ILR)" (6 September 2006). Interview with Warrant Officer Gordon Cullen and Master Corporal Seanan Houlihan (Ma'Sum Ghar, Afghanistan 2 August 2010).
59. Fraser interview.
60. Gasparotto interview; Lavoie interview; Fraser interview.
61. Rankin, "TIC-Operation MEDUSA Initial Assault on Pashmore [sic] 3 September 2006 Incident Lessons Report (ILR)."

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62. Adam Day, "Operation Medusa: The Battle for Panjwayi Part One," *Legion Magazine* (1 September 2007).
63. Schreiber interview, Lipscey interview, Adams interview; Fraser interview.
64. Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010); Lipscey interview; Lavoie interview.
65. Lipscey interview; Lavoie interview.
66. Sajjan interview.
67. Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*, p. 148.
68. Lavoie interview.
69. Horn, *No lack of Courage*, pp. 63-66; Abthorpe interview; Cullen and Houlihan interview. There is a discrepancy in the sources as to when Charles Company stepped off: 0600, 0620, 0630 and even 0730 hours.
70. Lavoie interview.
71. Rankin, "TIC-Operation MEDUSA Initial Assault on Pashmore [sic] 3 September 2006 Incident Lessons Report (ILR)." See also attached 3 September 2006 story boards.
72. Cullen and Houlihan interview.
73. Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*, p. 148.
74. Abthorpe interview.
75. Cullen and Houlihan interview.
76. Lipscey interview.
77. Cullen and Houlihan interview.
78. Freakley interview.
79. Lavoie interview.
80. TF Kandahar message log (4 September 2006). See also "Board of Inquiry Minutes of Proceedings: A-10A Friendly Fire Incident 4 September 2006, Panjwayi District, Afghanistan" convened 22 September 2006.
81. Lussier interview; TF Kandahar message log (4 September 2006).
82. 23 Field Squadron War Diary.
83. Lipscey interview.
84. Hillier, *A Soldier First*, p. 438.
85. Adams interview.
86. Adams interview.
87. Prohar interview.
88. This section is based on Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*.
89. See Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*.
90. Prohar interview. See also 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
91. Prohar interview.

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92. Another estimate was 300. See Fraser interview (28 April 2014).
93. Prohar interview. See also 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d). See also Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*.
94. Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*. See also interview with 2-87 sniper Sgt Aaron Riley (Wardak Province, 27 February 2009).
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Macbeth interview.
99. Lussier interview.
100. Fraser interview.
101. CTF Aegis Situation Update 1200L (7 September 2006).
102. CTF Aegis "Operation MEDUSA Situation Update: 2000" (4 September 2006).
103. Fraser interview; Lavoie interview.
104. CTF Aegis "Op MEDUSA Plan-04 September 2006" (4 September 2006).
105. CTF Aegis message 090400Z "Op MEDUSA." Lavoie interview; Fraser interview (9 September 2006).
106. FRAGO MEDUSA 2 B 060906-1680-RCS (6 September 2006).
107. FRAGO MEDUSA 2 B 060906-1680-RCS; Fraser interview (6 September 2006).
108. Abthorpe interview.
109. Ibid. Lipscey interview.
110. Gasparotto interview; 23 Field War Diary. See also Lipscey interview.
111. 23 Field War Diary.
112. Lavoie interview.
113. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS; Lavoie interview.
114. Bowman, "Operation MEDUSA."
115. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
116. Lussier interview.
117. Ibid.
118. Lavoie interview.
119. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS; Macbeth interview.
120. Freakley interview; Fraser interview.
121. Lavoie interview; Fraser interview.
122. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
123. 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
124. Fraser interview.

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125. Bowman, "Operation MEDUSA."
126. 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
127. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
128. 23 Field War Diary.
129. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
130. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
131. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
132. Bowman, "Operation MEDUSA."
133. SIGACT "180450Z September 06-Bicycle Bomb (BB) IED Strike v.3." Macbeth interview.
134. Wright interviews.
135. CTF Aegis Op MEDUSA 4-Hour Updates and 12-Hour SITREPS.
136. Macbeth interview.
137. Hetherington interview.
138. Message American Embassy Kabul to State, "PAG Makes First Recommendations to President Karzai" (21 August 2006).
139. Hetherington interview. See also Message American Embassy Kabul to State, "PRT Kandahar; Afghan National Army Implementation Snapshot" (16 December 2006).
140. 23 Field War Diary; Abthorpe interview; Lipscey interview.
141. Hetherington interview.
142. Gasparotto interview; 23 Field War Diary; Lavoie interview.
143. Hetherington interview; see also Maloney, *Confronting the Chaos*.
144. PRT source.
145. 23 Field War Diary.
146. Hetherington interview.
147. PRT meeting with Deputy Governor, "Emergency Response Council" (7 September 2006); PRT meeting with DMC, MRRD, UNAMA, WFP, UNHCR (9 September 2006); PRT meeting with US UNAMA, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR (19 September 2006).
148. Hetherington interview.
149. PRT "Meeting of LO PRT with GoK Haji Asadullah Khalid" (4-5 September 2006); PRT "CO PRT Visit of Mr. Habibullah Jan" (2-3 September 2006); "KLE 09- PRT Comd with GoK" (4-5 September 2006).
150. PRT "Notes from the Provincial Council Security Convention" (20 September 2006).
151. Ibid.
152. Fraser discussions with Maloney (July 2006).
153. "Visit Report/Post Visit Direction-Comd CEFCOM Visit to TFA 25 August-1 September 2006" (1 September 2006).
154. Leslie discussions with the author.
155. Lavoie interview.

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156. HQ TFA FRAGO 006 "Capability Enhancement Implementation" (October 2006).
157. 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment "Battle Group Briefing" (15 December 2006).
158. Gasparotto interview.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid.; 23 Field War Diary; "Multiple Location Attack-Final Version" (3 October 2006).
161. Gasparotto interview.
162. Ibid.
163. TFK "Multiple Ambush on TFK Elements V5" (14 October 2006); see also Horn, *No Lack of Courage*.
164. 23 Field Squadron War Diary.
165. Gasparotto interview.
166. "Rte Summit Construction: Progress to Date" (23 November 2006).
167. Abthorpe interview.
168. Abthorpe interview.
169. Abthorpe interview.
170. 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
171. Macbeth interview.
172. Cullen and Houlihan interview; Lussier interview.
173. Lussier interview.
174. Lussier interview.
175. Macbeth interview; Lussier interview.
176. Ibid.
177. Lussier interview.
178. "Sperwan Ghar-TF-31 and ISTAR Squadron TIC" (24 October 2006).
179. See Thijs W. Brocades Zaalberg, "The Roots of Dutch Counterinsurgency Balancing and Integrating Military and Civilian Efforts from Aceh to Oruzgan," Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands. He argues there IS no 'Dutch Method' at all.
180. C.J. Chivers, "Dutch Soldiers Stress Restraint in Afghanistan," *New York Times* (6 April 2007).
181. Ibid.
182. Interview with Lt Col Charlie Herbert, UK Army (Kandahar, 8 June 2007).
183. "RC (South) Planning Guidance-Operations in Kandahar Province in Support of Operations Oqab/Baaz Phase One" (14 November 2006).
184. COMCEFCOM Visit Report (1 September 2006).
185. Interview with LCol Tom Bradley (Edmonton, 10 February 2010).
186. Bradley interview. The sarcasm is mine and mine alone.
187. Bradley interview.

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188. Bradley interview.
189. Lipscey interview, interview with Major Trevor Cadieu, B Squadron Briefing to the author, "Tanks in Counter Insurgency Operations: Initial Lessons Learned."
190. TFK "G-3 End Tour Report" (5 February 2007).
191. Interview with LGen Mike Gauthier (Ottawa, 17 February 2012).
192. "Annex G Service Support TFK Op Ord 001-Op MEDUSA" (13 August 2006). Telephone interview with LCol Dan LaBrie (28 February 2012).
193. "NSE End Tour Report" (5 February 2007).
194. LaBrie interview.
195. "TAC Recce Report-National Support Element Roto 3" (25 September 2006).
196. "NSE End Tour Report" (5 February 2007).
197. Labrie interview.
198. Ibid.
199. Ibid.
200. C-IED End Tour Report (5 February 2007).
201. The complex inter-agency details of this issue are beyond the scope of this history and require a separate and detailed study. See interview with Major Steeve Gregoire (Kandahar Air Field, 11 May 2011).
202. TFK TIC slides (16 October 2006; 2 November 2006; 21 November 2006; 22 November 2006; 23 November 2006).
203. KLE meeting with Zharey elders and Habibullah Jan (13 November 2006).
204. KLE with Panjwayi elders and Habibullah Jan (25 November 2006).
205. Ibid.
206. PRT KLE at Governor's Palace (9 December 2006).
207. Interview with Lt Col Glenn Stockton, Australian Army (Kandahar 7 June 2006). Interview with Major Randy Graddic, U.S. Army (Kandahar, 3 July 2007).
208. Stockton interview.
209. "Op BAAZ TSUKA CEFCOM Update-JTF-AFG Observations" (1 December 2006).
210. http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/11/the-nato-riga-summit-time-for-backbone-in-the-alliance#_ftnref2.
211. Email Gauthier to Grant (5 December 2006).
212. 1 RCR BG Briefing, "Op BAAZ TSUKA."
213. 1st Battalion 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) briefing, "SOTF-31 Panjwayi/Pashmul Brief" (n/d).
214. 1 RCR BG Briefing, "Op BAAZ TSUKA."
215. Ibid.
216. TFK TIC slides (4, 5 and 6 December 2006).
217. Graddic interview; "Operation BAAZ TSUKA: CEFCOM Update" (14 January 2007).
218. This is noted in *Lions of Kandahar*. See also Cullen and Houlihan interview.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

219. FRAG O 01 op BAAZ TSUKA Ph 3 V.1 "Phase 2 C"; "Operation BAAZ TSUKA: CEFCOM Update" (14 January 2007).
220. Abthorpe interview.
221. "CEFCOM's Quarterly Assessment Report-Afghanistan 15 August-15 November 2006" (6 December 2006).
222. Interview with Major Trevor Cadieu and B Squadron Briefing to the author, "Tanks in Counter Insurgency Operations: Initial Lessons Learned."
223. Ibid.
224. Abthorpe interview.
225. Abthorpe interview; Interview with Major Trevor Cadieu; B Squadron Briefing to the author, "Tanks in Counter Insurgency Operations: Initial Lessons Learned."
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234. Ibid.
235. PRT "Meeting Report: Security Meeting for Zharey District" (17 December 2006).
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237. "Op SATYR PYRRHA: Establishment of Kandahar ADZ-JTF-Afghanistan Information Brief Update" (5 January 2007).
238. Gauthier interview.
239. Adams interview.

CONCLUSION

The first five years of the Canadian Army's involvement in Afghanistan were characterized by an initial and temporary commitment followed by a progressively deepened involvement on the strategic, operational, developmental, and capacity-building fronts as the situation evolved in Afghanistan.

Operation APOLLO, with the deployment of the 3 PPCLI Battle Group to KAF in the first half of 2002, was a relatively limited contribution to a larger American-led coalition operation designed to attack, disperse, and exploit the Al Qaeda organization after removing its Taliban 'shield'. Operation APOLLO's ground component provided crucial security in Kandahar Province for the plethora of forces conducting these operations and, as the situation developed, identified and mounted limited stabilization operations around KAF as part of this effort. In time, 3 PPCLI projected force out of KAF in conjunction with American forces in the process of putting Al Qaeda's conventional forces to flight in the Shah-i-Kot Valley, mounted a significant sensitive site exploitation mission to Tora Bora, provided a stable base of manoeuvre for American forces in the Khost region, and assisted in defining the operational situation in Zabul Province. These operations were integral to the larger American-led coalition effort in the country and, by effect, around the globe, yet at the same time served Canadian strategic purposes which revolved around demonstrative solidarity with the United States after the 9/11 attacks and the larger matter of identifying and reducing Al Qaeda's global threat to peace and stability. Though 3 PPCLI did not engage in significant combat operations at the battalion-level, the variety of its operations, when viewed as a whole, must be deemed successful as contributing to these strategic goals.

Canadian involvement in the higher aspects of the conflict, however, highlighted problems in the American approach to Afghanistan. The ambivalence at the highest levels in the American government regarding the post-Taliban, post-Al Qaeda situation in Afghanistan was identified early by Canadian officers but for the most part many believed that the European-led security assistance force and the international community-led reconstruction efforts would suffice. When those structures started to lose their momentum by 2003, Canada chose to re-commit forces to Afghanistan. The motives for this choice were more varied than those during the Operation APOLLO commitment but the strategic import of committing to the ISAF with a brigade headquarters and a battle group emerged over time. Simply put, Operation ATHENA, the Canadian-led ISAF stabilization mission in Kabul, deterred another destructive civil war in the capital and set the condition for the

emergence of a national government and then national elections. These steps, no matter how flawed, were essential if the international community was to invest in Afghanistan's reconstruction after twenty years of death and destruction.

There are already numerous arguments today about weaknesses and personality problems in the Afghan governance structure that emerged after 2003–2004 and the negative effects this system has had over time on the stability of the country. There is truth to some of these criticisms. However, the alternative was the withdrawal of coalition forces from the country and a repetition of the events of 1992–1993 followed by the re-assertion of jihadist-supported Taliban power in the country. No doubt Al Qaeda would have been invited back in and it is probable that the pre-2001 status quo would have been re-established. That was an unacceptable outcome for Canada.

The Canadian Army's involvement with Operation ATHENA in Kabul brought to the fore, yet again, the flaws in the international community's strategic approach to post-Taliban Afghan reconstruction. Measures were taken to rectify this state of affairs, based on the extensive experiences of a generation of Canadian soldiers who served in the Balkans throughout the 1990s. However, when those efforts were halted after Canada relinquished command of ISAF, the reconstruction situation threatened to slide into disarray yet again. Operation ARGUS and Operation ARCHER, the SAT-A, and the PRT in Kandahar Province, were central to turning this situation around. SAT-A, operating outside of the coalition frameworks, worked with the Afghans to craft the first real strategic plan for the country. At the same time, the decision to commit Canadians to a PRT demonstrated that Canada would 'walk the walk' in the provinces, not just 'talk the talk' in the capital. Accepting a PRT in the most volatile province in Afghanistan was a clear demonstration to the Afghans, the insurgents, the Europeans, and the Americans that Canada was deadly serious about Afghan recovery efforts.

Though there were always strategic coalition aspects of Canadian commitment decisions *vis-à-vis* the Americans and the Europeans, these should not be allowed to trump or otherwise overshadow how the deployed forces of Operations ATHENA, ARGUS, and ARCHER had a psychological as well as physical effect on the ground in the country. Those effects were only possible through the actions of highly professional Canadian soldiers at all levels, from the street all the way up the various coalition headquarters. The vertical and horizontal integration of the Canadian Army's efforts in Afghanistan by 2004–2005 was significantly improved and, as a result, Canada could exert influence in Kabul and in coalition circles in ways unimaginable before 2003, even back to the Cold War when it came to NATO.

Operations APOLLO and ATHENA, however, revealed that there was excessive micromanagement of tactical forces in Afghanistan by strategic command elements in Canada. These direct links, based in part on improved communications capabilities and

in part on modifications to traditional command levels, permitted political sensitivity to be transmitted with a greater frequency and a greater volume than in the past. This had a deleterious effect on operations in Kabul with consequent attenuation of Canada's ability to exert influence, particularly in 2004.

Similarly, the plodding implementation of the so-called '3D' approach, especially the nebulous divide between civil-military cooperation and development, plagued the Canadian effort right from the beginning. It was more through personalities than structure or policy that the Canadian departments were able to achieve any semblance of coordination by 2005.

Overall, the positive aspects of the Canadian Army's presence in Afghanistan during Operation ATHENA outweighed these negative issues. Canada's soldiers were instrumental in preventing not one but two *coup d'états* in 2003–2004. Working in partnership with the emergent Afghan National Army, the Canadian contingent protected the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga and played a significant role in national elections security in 2004. Throughout this period, the Canadian-led coalition mounted a campaign to disrupt terrorism in and around Kabul, which was superimposed on the other lines of operation. Canadian Army operations were successful in stabilizing Kabul so that other important activities could occur, and when those activities lost momentum, Canada's soldiers picked up the torch where they could.

When Canada committed a Canadian-led coalition headquarters and a battle group for operations alongside the PRT in Kandahar Province, no one in Ottawa seriously anticipated the escalating level of insurgent violence that CTF Aegis and TF Orion encountered in the first half of 2006. Undermanned and stretched thin, the TF Orion battle group encountered and absorbed the enemy's first major attacks west of Kandahar City while maintaining forces to counter the insurgency in the northern part of the province. If TF Orion had been unable to keep the lines of communications open to the west and north, British and Dutch forces would have been unable to deploy and conduct operations during this time, and NATO Stage III expansion would have become, perhaps, permanently delayed.

Unfortunately, a flawed coalition counter-narcotics policy and even more flawed implementation of that policy created more enemies in Helmand province than friends. Pakistan-based and supported insurgents rushed to assist this resistance. This in turn led to TF Orion repeatedly propping up the British position in Helmand Province in addition to deploying forces to maintain the Canadian and Afghan positions in Kandahar Province. It is only through the psychological and physical resiliency of Canada's soldiers, be they from the TF Orion battle group, CTF Aegis brigade headquarters, or the National Support Element, that disaster was averted.

The combined effects of the Glyn Berry assassination in January 2006 and the stepped up insurgency militated against significant PRT reconstruction and development operations in Kandahar. This stalled out the larger ambitions of the Afghan National Development Strategy in Kandahar Province. The Canadian Army's forces in Afghanistan now had to find a way to have combat operations and development coexist in the same battle space, which in turn led to the first iterations of counterinsurgency operations and their effects on campaign planning. TF Orion and the PRT moved towards this goal but were unable to achieve it before rotating out in August 2006.

TF Orion was, however, able to progressively define the new dimensions of the problem in Kandahar in engagement after engagement with the growing insurgency from the spring to the summer of 2006. The turning points were the Battle of Pashmul in July and a subsequent operation in the same area in August. These operations demonstrated that the enemy was better organized, equipped, and motivated than some in Kabul and Ottawa wanted to believe, and that the insurgency's leaders were starting to shift to a more conventional stance than before. The loss of Canadian lives on 3 August 2006 forced the more skeptical observers to accept that the point of main effort in southern Afghanistan lay in Kandahar city and its western districts, not in the poppy fields of the Sangin Valley in Helmand province. The enemy was at the gates, as it were. At the same time, these battles convinced wavering provincial power brokers to remain either on the fence or to stay on side with the government – for the time being. By then, there were few illusions that the situation in southern Afghanistan was significantly different from what APOLLO and ATHENA forces encountered from 2002 to 2005. This was not counter-terrorism and it was no longer stabilization. It was a lethal and politically complex environment, which demanded a forceful response at that time.

That situation forced the follow-on battle group, TF 3-06, to move away from fledgling steps taken towards counterinsurgency and to conduct more conventional-style operations against an enemy that was digging in to defend Zharey district west of the city so it could use it as a springboard to invest the city. Suddenly, the Canadian Army in Afghanistan had to refocus on reducing positional defence and at the same time figure out, yet again, how to handle development, reconstruction, or improving governance. Afghan security force capacity building was thrown atop this already heaping burden. In effect, the focus remained on the near-conventional operations with the PRT in a supporting role and little effort on capacity building. Little could be done elsewhere in the province with the operational focus on a single district and its neighbor, which served as a logistics conduit for the enemy.

When all was said and done, Canadian forces, and their Afghan and American allies, dealt a series of body blows to the insurgency throughout the summer and fall of 2006.

It started with Operation ZAHAR and then the inadvertent contact with A Company 2 PPCLI at Ma'Sum Ghar in August, through 1 RCR battle group and Operation MEDUSA in September and October. Insurgent efforts vis-à-vis cutting off Kandahar City and convincing wavering power brokers to change sides were disrupted. The failure by the Dutch-led Regional Command (South) to properly consolidate during Operation BAAZ TSUKA and the refocusing of resources away from Kandahar and on Operation ACHILLES in Helmand in early 2007 forced the Canadian Army back onto the defensive in Kandahar Province. Canada could disrupt, but could not consolidate. TF 3-06 finally culminated with mounting casualties, broken vehicles, and severe personnel fatigue after a hard six-month fight.

The situation, as it stood in early 2007, was that the insurgency posed a serious and long-term challenge to the Afghan political system and reconstruction effort that Canada's soldiers mentored, assisted, and protected. Kandahar City was Afghanistan's 'second city'. It sat astride an age-old regional trade route between Asia and the Middle East. It was the religious centre of the south. The insurgents needed the city to meet their objectives. Canada and its Afghan and American allies were in a position to prevent them from achieving those objectives. There was not going to be any reinforcement of the Canadian position any time soon. The Europeans were uninterested and the Americans were mostly focused on their operations in Iraq. The Afghans were still recovering.

To make matters worse, there was a growing movement amongst opposition groups in Canada to pull out of the war. Every casualty, every mistake, perceived or real, now became fodder for these opponents when projected through the exaggerated but simplistic lens of the media and its associated commentators. This increased the pressure on Canada's soldiers as much as the insurgency did. If Canada's soldiers had failed to negotiate this complex terrain, they would have been forced to withdraw from Afghanistan with catastrophic effects on coalition operations in southern Afghanistan.

Those leading Canada's forces in Afghanistan had little choice. The insurgency had to be dealt with using whatever resources they had at hand or could bring to the fight in this new environment. If the battle for Kandahar Province failed, the entirety of Canada's five-year investment in Afghanistan's future would be jeopardized by the subsequent renewal of widespread fighting across the south, with a possible partition of the northern provinces and a slide back into the medieval dark years of 1993-2001. That scenario was too terrible to contemplate. Canadians set out once again to stabilize the situation so that development, reconstruction, and governance could move forward, this time under fire. That story is the subject of Volume II.

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APPENDIX A:

PAKISTAN AND THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN TO 2006

During the course of the war in Afghanistan, the role played by the government of Pakistan and its security forces in supporting the insurgency was a highly sensitive topic. On one hand, Pakistan assisted the coalition to a certain extent by selectively capturing high-profile Al Qaeda leaders like Abu Zubaydah (2002) and Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (2003), which in turn had global effects on the Al Qaeda organization.¹ On the other hand, Pakistan also assisted with the creation of and provided substantial ongoing support for the Taliban movement. Pakistan and its security forces' role in the origins and support for the Taliban is undisputed.

In 1994, stoppages of trade along the regionally vital Highway 4 route from Quetta to Kandahar and beyond were frequent due to inter-faction competition in and around Kandahar. A concerted Pakistani covert policy initiative involving the ISI covert action organization and a religious militia funded by merchants from Quetta took over Spin Boldak from Hekmatyar's HiG organization, which was linked to narcotics producers in Helmand. Students from Pakistani madrassas preaching Wahhabism fed Mullah Omar's militia and, in time, the movement developed momentum in the chaotic Pashtun-dominated southern Afghanistan. Pakistan saw the Taliban as a means of gaining stability in Afghanistan and as a result, the Pakistani military provided technical and intelligence support as the Taliban battled what would become the Northern Alliance.²

From 2001 to 2006, Pakistan displayed multiple competing and even conflicting policies. The inability of Pakistan's leaders to reconcile this state of affairs by wilfully ignoring the problem or deflecting it in unhealthy directions seriously affected the subsequent course of events in Afghanistan and led to progressively increased violence against Canadian soldiers as they went about their duties. Again, there is little or no debate that this is the case both from Canadian primary sources and internal analysis but more importantly from the bulk of the secondary source literature produced since 2001 on the matter of Pakistan and the Taliban. Internal coalition sensitivities regarding a full-fledged discussion and acceptance of the facts were far outstripped by this increasingly credible body of work.

There was, for all intents and purposes, no organized insurgency in Afghanistan in the wake of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM by late 2002. There were Taliban stragglers, lost Al Qaeda trainers, and other low-level personnel affiliated with both organizations but there were few weapons, no central direction, and no reinforcement.

Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf declared in January 2002 that there would be no more support by Pakistan for radical groups.³ The predominant regional crisis while Operation ENDURING FREEDOM conducted its sensitive site exploitation missions was a military standoff with nuclear dimensions between India and Pakistan. This crisis was initiated when a Pakistan supported terrorist group, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), attacked the Kashmir Assembly in Srinagar on 1 October 2001, killing 35 people. This was followed by a JeM assault on the Indian Parliament itself on 13 December 2001. India conducted a general mobilization, Operation PARAKRAM, which lasted until October 2002. Pakistan responded with its own mobilization and the movement of two corps from the Pakistan-Afghan border east to the Kashmir-Pakistan border.⁴ It is possible that Al Qaeda facilitated or otherwise encouraged this attack in order to draw off Pakistani security forces from the Durand Line so that Osama bin Laden could escape Tora Bora.

Canada kept a close eye on events in June 2002 in case they escalated to the point of nuclear weapons use, which appeared likely for several days. The Joint Operations Group prepared plans to evacuate Canadian nationals and Operation APOLLO naval forces in the Indian Ocean were directed away from the Pakistani coastline.⁵ In Kandahar, LCol Pat Stogran requested and received NBCD protective equipment for the Canadian contingent in a matter of days.⁶ In time the crisis waned. By the fall of 2002, it was history.

One of the effects of the Operation PARAKRAM mobilization was the decision by Pakistan to keep as many Taliban and other Pakistan-supported jihadis ‘on tap,’ as it were, for irregular operations against India in the event the crisis escalated.⁷ By early 2003, the defeated Taliban was reorganizing in camps provided by the Pakistani security services and, in time, the Quetta Shura emerged as a leadership body in the south.⁸ The formation of the Peshawar Shura quickly followed. Hekmatyar’s HiG was already active in Kabul, and limited Al Qaeda terrorist operations were underway in the Afghan capital. ‘Non-insurgent insurgents’ in Kandahar laid mines for pay and the first IEDs were used against an American patrol in March 2003.⁹ Between July and December 2003, American forces engaged small groups of armed insurgents in Nuristan, Paktika, and Spin Boldak, while major shoot outs took place in Shkin regularly. An Al Qaeda/Taliban raid killed two CIA paramilitaries in Paktia. Romanian forces were also ambushed south of KAF, while the UNAMA facility in Kandahar City was car bombed.¹⁰ What changed?

According to David C. Isby, “The Afghanistan Taliban and their insurgent allies that have emerged from the Vortex are not the same pre-2001 organizations...the Afghanistan Taliban in Pakistan accelerated their cross-fertilization from other organizations.... This included participation in the rise of the Pakistan Taliban.”¹¹ This was made easier when Musharraf publicly announced that he would end the use of Pakistan-supported terrorist groups in Kashmir as a method of de-escalation. Those groups, of which there are

nearly too many to list, came 'home' from Kashmir and, having common ideology with the Taliban and having the same ISI support and training networks, exchanged ideas and methods.¹² Clearly, this critical mass was a potential threat to the existing Pakistan system.

One of the Taliban's first moves was to announce to the world through fax and email that they still existed. A series of terrorist attacks against the Shi'as in Quetta in late 2003¹³ followed to intimidate and challenge Pakistani governance in Baluchistan. In June, ethnic Hazara police trainers were murdered. In July, a Shi'a mosque was stormed, resulting in 55 deaths. On 2 March 2004, 44 Shi'as were killed in a Quetta mosque in another attack, which coincided with terrorist attacks against Shi'a targets in Karbala and Baghdad in Iraq on the same day. These attacks sent a message to the Pakistani government: the Sunni Wahhabist Taliban and its allies were capable of coordinated international action against any group if they were not accommodated.¹⁴

At the same time, the Pakistani security services had to accommodate the terrorist groups they created while appeasing the United States in the hunt for the 9/11 perpetrators. A third element was the ongoing and long standing strategic equation that Pakistan could not fight a strong Afghanistan and India at the same time in any future conflict. By supporting these fighting groups and encouraging them to focus their efforts on a weak Afghanistan, some of the notional pressure on Pakistan was relieved in the eyes of the Pakistani security apparatus. The idea that Pakistan kept the Taliban alive on life support as a hedge against American withdrawal from Afghanistan took root sometime in 2004 but as the United States and NATO discussed handing over security operations to ISAF, this was increasingly seen as the policy direction to take in 2005. Pakistani authorities believed that the United States was going to disengage and were, as ever, concerned about a power vacuum in Afghanistan that might lead to Iranian or, worse, Indian influence predominating.¹⁵ This in part led to even more slackening of pressure on the Taliban.

Related to this was the territory of South Waziristan. Part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (or FATA), areas like Waziristan were self-governing under agreements dating back to the creation of Pakistan in the 1940s. The only armed forces technically permitted in the FATA were the Frontier Corps, a border gendarmerie drawn from local people in the tribal areas. The retreating Taliban and Al Qaeda forces were ideologically attuned to the conservative hill peoples and in any event outgunned the Frontier Corps.

Prompted by the United States, the Pakistani Army mounted forays into South Waziristan throughout 2004 to roust an Al Qaeda safe haven in that area. This broke a long-standing agreement in which South Waziristan was self-policing and encouraged a backlash by a growing Pakistani Taliban movement. Increasingly mired in an insurgency that could expand and threaten the continued existence of the state, Pakistan negotiated a peace accord with the insurgent coalition there in 2004. Part of the deal was likely to back off on pressurizing the Quetta Taliban.

In the fall of 2005, the Pakistan government initiated a public crackdown on insurgent activities in Gilgit Agency (area of northern Kashmir), suppressed three indigenous extremist religious parties, and implemented policies designed to reduce outside monies and foreigners going to unregulated religious schools (madrassas).¹⁶ This was mostly cosmetic; Gilgit Agency was in the north of the country, away from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas abutting Afghanistan which harboured Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

All of these factors gave the Quetta Shura not just breathing space but room to expand in 2004 and 2005. “Wandering Mullahs” arrived in rural areas of southern Afghanistan to proselytize and exploit local grievances, while cell-like networks were slowly established in Kandahar city. A build-up of arms in northern Kandahar districts and in Oruzgan province proceeded once routes through Zabul were finalized and connected to depots in Pakistan. “Night letters” proliferated to intimidate and make the Taliban appear omnipotent.¹⁷ Merchants in Quetta were also canvassed for funds, but the real financial windfall for the Taliban and the other extremist groups was the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. This permitted international monies to flow into Pakistan the form of unmonitored “relief aid” through fake non-governmental organizations and other entities. The Taliban also was able to extort “taxes” from relief workers who wanted to access stricken areas, or provide transport “security.” The chaos also permitted the flow of international jihadis and “students” for Deobandist and Wahhabist madrassas in Pakistan to increase significantly. In this, Saudi Arabia pressured Pakistan to permit these “students” to come into the country to “help.”¹⁸

Enough of the pieces were in place by late 2005 and early 2006 and, as mentioned in Chapters 9 and 10, the violence level in southern Afghanistan significantly increased throughout the spring and summer of 2006. This coincided with the deterioration of the security situation in North and South Waziristan over in Pakistan. A variety of groups, including Al Qaeda, HiG, and Haqqani Tribal Network, were using the rough terrain and a recalcitrant anti-Pakistan government population to conceal themselves. The Musharraf government forces clashed with local power brokers, which led to even more bad blood. An American analysis noted that “limited resources, rugged terrain, and uneven capability and support within the Pakistani military Frontier Corps and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) limit Pakistan’s ability to deliver quick results.”¹⁹ At the same time, Pakistan was confronted with a long-standing insurgency in Baluchistan and outside analysts wondered if “the Pakistani military is already overstretched along its western borders.”²⁰

The idea that the FATA and the North West Frontier Province were coalescing into what historian David C. Isby calls “The Vortex” was taking hold in American analytic circles by 2006. FATA and the North West Frontier Province were self-governing areas going back to the 1800s with carefully constructed political relationships with the central government

of Pakistan. These extremely conservative mountain communities had been the front line of the logistics support structure in the ISI-led war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. They were also vital narcotics processing areas for the raw material acquired in Afghanistan and the end product was shipped south to Karachi or through eastern Iran. Indeed, there was intersection between resistance groups and the narcos in these areas going back decades. Now, with the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban operating in these spaces, how to approach the problem in a systematic fashion was unclear.²¹ The American response was to increase arms-length funding for the Frontier Corps and border security.²²

Pakistani Army progress in these areas, particularly North and South Waziristan, was not encouraging. This was chalked up to tactical and technical issues²³ but some wondered how serious the Pakistani Army was about launching these kinds of operations in places they traditionally did not operate in, and for which the ISI was responsible for. Indeed, the Pakistani Army tended to use the ill-equipped, locally provided Frontier Corps, which proved less than enthusiastic in its operations against fellow Pashtuns.²⁴

From the garbled reportage in the FATA during the summer of 2006, it appeared as though there was a new player emerging on the scene: the Pakistani Taliban. At some point, a number of Pakistani Pashtun groups in the FATA made common cause, likely with Al Qaeda encouragement,²⁵ and started to muscle in on established local conservative religious parties that had an uneasy relationship to the Afghanistan Taliban and was operating out of Quetta in Baluchistan. It was not clear whether this was Al Qaeda establishing a new ‘franchise’ or if it was the Taliban using Al Qaeda to reduce the influence of these local parties. There were warnings that all of these elements would coalesce and take over all of the agencies in FATA.²⁶

All the while, the fighting in North Waziristan continued until the Pakistan government had enough. There was a cease-fire in June 2006, which did not bode well for the situation in Afghanistan: “Acceding to the terms offered by militants will undermine the Government of Pakistan’s efforts to seal the border and restore law and order, but not negotiating at all could bolster the cause of the militants”²⁷ and thus push them into the emerging Pakistani Taliban camp that was developing. Either the Pakistan government backed off in North Waziristan and accommodated the Waziris, or the Waziris would join the other groups, which would endanger FATA and possibly Pakistan as a state. One observer warned that “without Government of Pakistan troops, North Waziristan could become increasingly Talibanized.”²⁸

In September 2006, Pakistan signed the final Waziristan Peace Accord in Miramshah. With the disengagement of Pakistani security forces from South Waziristan, the Taliban and others now fresh from the fight moved on to southern Afghanistan to join their fellows in Kandahar and Helmand, with the assistance of the Pakistani Army and the ISI.

(American SOF uncovered evidence of direct logistical support in September–October 2006 during operations in the Reg Desert in the shaping phases of Operation MEDUSA).²⁹ Clearly, the bulk of the insurgent forces engaged during Operation MEDUSA were not indigenous to Panjwayi and Zharey districts, nor were many of them even Afghan in nationality though distinguishing between Afghan Pashtuns and Pakistani Pashtuns was and remains no easy task in such an environment. We can only speculate what might have happened after 2006 had these forces not been available to reinforce the faltering insurgent effort in Kandahar.

By the end of 2006, Taliban influence in Pakistan was “spreading into new areas” in FATA.³⁰ Moreover, by this time, the number of attacks against coalition forces in Regional Command (East) in Afghanistan was noticeably higher.

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GLOSSARY

3eR22eR	3 ^e Bataillon du Royal 22 ^e Régiment
9/11	September 11th, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, United States
ACAG	anti-coalition armed group
ACE	Allied Command Europe
ADM (Mat)	Assistant Deputy Manager (Materiel)
ADZ	Afghan Development Zone
AEF	Afghan Eradication Force
AEV	armoured engineer vehicle
AFNORTH	Allied Forces North Europe
AIA	Afghan Interim Administration – temporary Afghan government agreed to during the Bonn Agreement
American commands (CJTf-180, CJSOTF, CJCMOTF, CFC-A)	These American commands were grouped together in Afghanistan as Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. They are, respectively, the conventional forces; the special forces; the command associated with training and assisting Afghanistan and the overall headquarters of the American effort in Afghanistan
AMF	Afghan Militia Forces – Indigenous anti-Taliban Afghan forces whose loyalty remained to tribal chieftains
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANAP	Afghan National Auxiliary Police
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ANTC	Afghan National Training Center
AO	area of operations

GLOSSARY

AOR	area of responsibility
APC	armoured personnel carrier
AQ	Al Qaeda
ARRC	NATO's ACE Rapid Reaction Corps
ARTHUR	artillery hunting radar
ASIC	All Source Intelligence Centre
ATA	Afghan Transitional Administration – follow on government to the AIA prior to elections. The ATA took over from the AIA in 2003. President Hamid Karzai led both and they were the recognized government in 2003–2004.
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
AWK	Ahmad Wali Karzai
BAF	Bagram Air Field
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BMP	Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty – Soviet mechanized infantry combat vehicle
BOI	Board of Inquiry
BSB	Brigade Support Battalion
CA	Civil Affair – American equivalent of CIMIC
CADPAT	Canadian disruptive pattern
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CANBAT	Canadian Battalion
CANCAP	Canadian Contractor Augmentation Programme
CANSOF	Canadian Special Operations Forces
CARE	Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere
CASEVAC	casualty evacuation

GLOSSARY

CCF	Commander's Contingency Fund – Canadian funding for civil-military cooperation activities
CDA	Canadian Defence Academy
CDC	Community Development Council
CDS, DCDS, and VCDS	Chief of the Defence Staff, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff – prior to the creation of Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command in 2006, the DCDS was responsible for overseas operations.
CEFCOM	Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command
CENTCOM	Central Command – a U.S. command for the Middle East and southwest Asia
CER	Combat Engineer Regiment
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Programme – American funding for civil affairs activities
CEXC	combined explosives exploitation cell – American counter-IED organization
CF	Canadian Forces (nomenclature CAF took effect in 2013)
CFC-A	Combined Forces Command Afghanistan – American command for Afghanistan
CFJSR	Canadian Forces Joint Signal Regiment
CFPSA	Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIG	Confidence in Government
CIMIC	civil-military cooperation – handles liaison with the civilian leadership and the population in a given area
CinC	Commander-in-Chief
CINCNORTH	Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces North Europe
CIVPOL	civilian police – Canadian civilian police component of the PRT

GLOSSARY

CJCMOTF	Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CJTF-76	Combined Joint Task Force 76 – American divisional headquarters for Afghanistan
CLJ	Constitutional Loya Jirga
CLP	combat logistics patrol
CMA	Central Military Area
CNS	Camp Nathan Smith – home of the Provincial Reconstruction Team
COMISAF	Commander International Security Assistance Force
CONOP	Contingency Operation
CONPLAN	Contingency Plan
CP	command post
CPEF	Central Poppy Eradication Force
CPEP	Central Poppy Eradication Programme
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CSC	Civil Service Commission
CTF	combined task force
CTSO	Counterterrorism Special Operations – predecessor of Canadian Special Operations Command
DA	dissemination area
DART	Disaster Assistance Response Team
DCDS	Canadian Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, responsible for overseas operations before CEFCOM was established in 2006
DCO	Deputy Commanding Officer
DComd	Deputy Commander
DDA	district development assemblies

GLOSSARY

DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. DDR is the process for soldiers to return to civilian life and the cantonment of their weapons. It is also a verb: “to DDR.” Heavy weapons cantonment is a subset of DDR but a separate programme.
DEVAD	Development Advisor
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (the department name is correct for the time period)
DFID	Department for International Development – a British equivalent of CIDA
DIAG	disbandment of illegally armed groups
DND	Department of National Defence
DOCEX	document exploitation
DTF	detainee transfer facility
EAG	External Advisory Group
ECM	electronic countermeasures
EOD	explosive ordnance disposal
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
ESF	NATO Elections Support Force
ETT	Embedded Training Team – Canadian and allied mentors to the Afghan National Army working for Task Force Phoenix
Eurocorps	European Corps – an intergovernmental army corps, which includes military personnel from nine nations. It is a force for the European Union and NATO; their headquarters is in Strasbourg, France.
EW	electronic warfare
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Agencies
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLIR	forward looking infrared system
FOB	forward operating base

GLOSSARY

FOO/FAC	forward observation officer/forward air controller
FOSAF	Follow-On Security Assistance Force
FSB	Forward Support Battalion – American logistic organization at Kandahar Air Field
FSG	Forward Support Group – the Canadian logistics organization for Afghanistan
FST	Field Support Team – Canadian human intelligence team
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HEAT	high-explosive anti-tank (warhead)
HiG	Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin
HIMARS	high-mobility artillery rocket system
HLMV	heavy logistics vehicle wheeled
HOS	Head of State
HQ	headquarters
HUMINT	human intelligence
HVT	high-value target
HWC	heavy weapons cantonment
I-ANDS	Interim Afghan National Development Strategy
IC	international community
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent
IDP	internally displaced persons (camp)
IED	improvised explosive device
IEDD	improvised explosive device disposal
IFOR	Implementation Force
ILOC	integrated lines of communications – logistics agreement between Canada and the United States

GLOSSARY

IMF	Investment Management Framework (defunct NATO strategy) or International Monetary Fund (organization)
IMP	individual meal pack
IO	international organization
IRF(L)	Immediate Reaction Force (Land) – a battalion on standby for global deployment within a given number of days
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISB	Intermediate Staging Base – a Canadian logistics element in Turkey
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
ISTAR	intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance
JCC	Joint Coordination Centre
JDAMS	joint direct attack munition
JDOC	Joint Defence Operations Centre – the headquarters at Kandahar Air Field coordinating the defence of the base
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
JEMB	Joint Election Monitoring Board
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JOC	Joint Operations Centre
JOG	Joint Operations Group
JPCC	Joint Provincial Coordination Centre – located at the Governor’s Palace
JSCC	Joint Security Coordination Centre
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JTF-SWA	Joint Task Force South West Asia
JRT	Joint Regional Team – predecessor to the Provincial Reconstruction Team concept

GLOSSARY

JTAC	joint terminal air controller – the personnel, usually artillery, who handle the laser and satellite guidance systems to target precision munitions
JTF-A	Joint Task Force Afghanistan
K2	Karshi-Khanabad – one of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM’s main air base
KAF	Kandahar Air Field – Bagram Air Field, KAF, K2 were Operation ENDURING FREEDOM’s main air bases inside Afghanistan.
KAIA	Kabul Afghanistan International Airport
KBR	Kellogg, Brown & Root – American engineering, procurement, and construction company
KCP	Kabul City Police
KEP	key entry point
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLE	key leader engagement
KMNB	ISAF’s Kabul Multinational Brigade
KMTC	Kabul Military Training Centre
KSK	Kommando Spezialkräfte (Special Forces Command, Germany)
KUS	Kandahar Ulema Shura
LAV	light armoured vehicle
LFWA, LFCA	Land Force Western Area, Land Force Central Area (Canadian Army area headquarters in Canada)
LZ	Landing Zone
MACTP	Mine Awareness and Clearance Training Programme
Maz	Mazar-e Sharif
MCF	main contingency force
MEDEVAC	medical evacuation

GLOSSARY

MEWT	Mobile Electronic Warfare Team
MLVW	medium logistics vehicle wheeled
MMU	Multinational Medical Unit
MND	Minister of National Defence
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Minister of Interior
MQ-1	MQ-1 Predator is an unmanned aerial vehicle
MQ-9	MQ-9 Reaper is an unmanned aerial vehicle
MRE	meal ready-to-eat
MRRD	Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MSG	Ma'Sum Ghar
MTA	military technical agreement
MTAP	Military Training Assistance Programme
MVT	medium-value target
MWR	moral, welfare, and recreation
MYRM	NATO SFOR Multi-Year Road Map (or merm)
N2K	Nangarhar, Kunar, and Khost provinces
NAPCE	National Assembly and Provincial Council Elections
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCE	National Command Element
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NDHQ	National Defence Headquarters
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NGO	non-governmental organization
NORSOF	Norwegian Special Operations Forces

GLOSSARY

NSE	National Support Element
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCF	other coalition forces – type of American special operations forces
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha – 12-man U.S. special forces team
ODB	Operational Detachment Bravo
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM – the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan
OGA	Other Government Agency
OGD	other government department – Canadian term for non-CF, non-DND personnel
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OMLT	Operational Mentor and Liaison Team – a NATO version of the Embedded Training Team
Op	Operation
OP	observation post
OPLAN	Operation Plan
OPSEC	Operations Security
ORM	Operational Road Map – the ‘MYRM’ for the IMF
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSGAP	Office of the Secretary General for Afghanistan and Pakistan
PBSG	Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar
PBW	Patrol Base Wilson
PD	police district – the basic administrative-geographic organization of Kabul City in 2003-2004
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
POC	Provincial Operations Centre

GLOSSARY

POLAD	Political Advisor
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
PPIED	pressure-plated improvised explosive device
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PSYOPS	psychological operations – one of several information operations or IO activities designed to influence friends and enemies through messaging
PTS	Program Takhim-e Sohl – “Strengthening Through Peace” amnesty programme
PWGSC	Public Works and Government Services Canada
QIP	quick impact project
QRF	quick reaction force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RALC	Régiment d'artillerie légère du Canada
RBC	Régiment blindé du Canada
RC (South)	Regional Command (South)
RCD	The Royal Canadian Dragoons
RCHA	Royal Canadian Horse Artillery
RCIED	radio-controlled improvised explosive device
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCP	route clearance package
RCR	The Royal Canadian Regiment
RDZ	Regional Development Zone
REMBAS	remotely monitored battle field sensor system
RGC	Régiment du génie de combat (Eng – CER)
RIP	relief in place

GLOSSARY

RMC	Royal Military College
ROE	rule of engagement
Roto	rotation
ROWPU	reverse osmosis water purification unit
ROZ	restricted operating zone – an area where aircraft are not permitted to fly into
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
RWS	remote weapon system
SA	situational awareness
SACEUR	NATO's Supreme Commander Europe
SAGEM	Société d'Applications Générales de l'Électricité et de la Mécanique (brand name)
SAS	Special Air Service
SAT-A	Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan
SBS	Special Boat Service
SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land – U.S. Navy's principal special operations force and a part of the Naval Special Warfare Command and United States Special Operations Command
SFOR	Stabilization Force – NATO-led force in Bosnia
SFGA	Special Forces Group (Airborne)
SHIRBRIG	UN Standby High-Readiness Brigade
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SLOC	strategic lines of communications – logistics path back to Canada
SNC	Surveyer Nenniger & Chênevert, Inc. (now SNC-Lavalin, a Canadian engineering firm)
SOAR	Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOF	Special Operations Forces

GLOSSARY

SOFT	Special Operations Task Force
SQFT	Secteur du Québec de la Force terrestre (French for Land Force Québec Area LFQA)
SRT	Strategic Reconnaissance Team (or strategic recce)
SSE	sensitive site exploitation
SSR	security sector reform
SST	“Shit Sucker Trucks”
SVBIED	suicide vehicle-born improvised explosive device
TAA	tactical assembly area
TAC	tactical air control
TCCC	Tactical Combat Casualty Care
tEOD	Telerob explosive ordnance device and observation robot
TET	Tactical Exploitation Team
TF	task force
TFA	Task Force Afghanistan
TFK	Task Force Kabul or Task Force Kandahar
TIC	Troops in Contact
TK Road	Tarinkot road
TOW	tube-launched optically-tracked, wire-guided (launchers)
TUAV	tactical unmanned aerial vehicle
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UBL	Usama bin Laden
UK	United Kingdom
UMS	unit medical station

GLOSSARY

UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNGOMAP	United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan
UNMACA	United Nations Mine Action Centre Afghanistan
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
UNSC	United Nation Security Council
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USNORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
UTN	Ummah Tameer-e-Nau – a Pakistani ‘humanitarian’ non-governmental organization
UXO	unexploded ordnance
VIP	very important person
VOR	vehicle off road
VRE	Voter Registration and Elections – operations supporting elections including registration, polling, ballot-counting and the protection thereof to ensure transparency, impartiality, and legitimacy
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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Dr. Sean M. Maloney

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