

What is Canada doing in Afghanistan?

Posted by

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VPC - A forum with the International Socialists Speaker Valerie Lannon at UVic Student Union bldg room B028 (lower level) Wednesday March 15th 7 pm

www.PEJ.org

What is Canada doing in Afghanistan?

We will look at what Canada's military is doing in Afghanistan, why, what Canadians have to say about this, and a discussion of what we want to do in response.

Some background reading on Afghanistan:

Analyst says current strategy making matters worse

PEGGY MASON

Special to Globe and Mail

March 10, 2006

[http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060307.wafghanmason0307/EmailBNStory/Afghanistan/home)

[RTGAM.20060307.wafghanmason0307/EmailBNStory/Afghanistan/home](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060307.wafghanmason0307/EmailBNStory/Afghanistan/home)

NATO's Afghanistan troop dilemma

by Ahmed Rashid

Monday, 26 December 2005,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4526150.stm

Rule of law or 'rule of bomb'?

Our military role in Afghanistan legally indefensible, activist says

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By Mike Youds

Kamloops Daily News Staff Reporter

March 7, 2006

KAMLOOPS, B.C. - A Kamloops military veteran has submitted a detailed brief to Prime Minister Stephen Harper outlining Canadian violations of international law in Afghanistan.

John McNamer, a decorated Vietnam war veteran turned peace activist, said Canadian troops should be withdrawn immediately from Afghanistan or they and their leaders could face possible criminal charges.

His warnings come just as Canadian troops face intensified action and worsening violence in the war-torn country.

Canada's role has changed dramatically from that of a peacekeeper to a military force engaged in daily conflict, McNamer notes. "In the last six months it's changed incredibly and people are not aware of it," McNamer said.

"Canada is basically moving into a U.S.-style war and is more subservient to the U.S. in Afghanistan. We report directly to U.S. troops."

About 2,200 Canadian troops are currently posted in Afghanistan, where they are said to be assisting with security and reconstruction in Kandahar province as part of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom.

Capt. Trevor Greene sat down for a Saturday meeting with village elders about 70 kilometres north of Kandahar when a man attacked him from behind with an axe while shouting a Muslim prayer. The attacker was immediately shot dead by Canadian soldiers, who were then attacked by militants with guns and a grenade. No other Canadians were hurt and more enemy casualties were not confirmed. In total, three Canadians have died and more than two dozen have been injured in 2006.

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Canada hands over prisoners to U.S.

McNamer said Canadian troops appear to be engaged in more than what official reports are letting on. Canada appears to be breaching international human rights laws by handing over Afghan prisoners to the U.S.

Canada has also been involved in what is termed "illegal renditions," the handing over of detainees to countries where they are tortured, as was the case with Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian.

Some of the corroborating detail in his five-page brief is based on the report of M. Cherif Bassiouni, who was appointed by the UN Commission on Human Rights to look into possible human rights violations in Afghanistan. Bassiouni submitted his report to the UN in March 2005.

"Canada is turning over its detainees to the U.S., which does not abide by the Geneva Conventions where they apply to detainees. The U.S. is getting away with it because it does not acknowledge that particular section and S?does not comply with them."

"This was a major issue in 2002 and it's not an issue in 2005? Why is that? Are we still a nation that abides by the rules of international law or are we going under the direction of the U.S. and abiding by the rule of bomb?"

McNamer took note of what was said at TRU recently by Michael Byers, a visiting UBC professor and Canada research chair in international law.

"He pointed out that Canada is in a position of jeopardy by handing detainees over to the U.S. without considering the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. But very few people want to talk about it. They want to push it under the rug because they're not comfortable with it."

Byers said he has received McNamer's brief but has not had a chance to read it. He

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applauds the veteran, however, for demanding answers from the federal government. "I personally feel quite strongly that there should be a vote in Parliament," Byers said. Monday. The outcome of such a vote would likely support continuing deployment but the debate itself would underscore a "principle of democracy."

"I'm concerned about how the mission has changed," Byers said. "When we sent in the 2,000-plus soldiers it was defined as a reconstruction mission, but they're not reconstructing anymore."

Unfortunately, the issue was not discussed during the recent federal election campaign, he said. The covert nature of many of the activities of coalition forces in the region means there can be no accountability of their actions but there should at least be accountability after a period of time has elapsed, he said.

"This is why we need a public debate on this issue," Byers said. "The facts will come out." McNamer believes that Harper may be positioned to address the issue since it was his political predecessor, Paul Martin, who authorized Canada's initial and heightened role in Afghanistan.

"What I'm hoping, with a new leader coming in and examining all the positions Canada is in, there is an opportunity for re-examining the decisions made in the past."

In addition to sending a letter and copy of the brief to Harper, McNamer tried to post it on the Department of National Defence website headed "Write to the Troops." He believes troops have the right and an obligation to understand the implications of their role.

But so far McNamer's brief seems to have been ignored or overlooked in the week since it was sent. The office of Gordon O'Connor, minister of defence, did acknowledge receipt. "Why do we have a House of Commons?" asked McNamer, who ranches near Cache Creek and resides in Kamloops. "MPs seem to have no information."

Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay has said he regrets that there was not a vote in Parliament before Canadian troops were first sent to Afghanistan. But questioning Canada's

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role at this point could jeopardize the safety and security of troops at this time, MacKay said on Monday.

MP Betty Hinton was in Toronto and could not be reached for comment on Sunday or Monday. Her constituency office said she would not be available for the rest of the week. Calls to the offices of Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay and Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day were not returned either.

"It's going to be interesting to see if (Hinton) is willing to defend a situation where Canadian forces are clearly in violation of Geneva Conventions," McNamer said. "We're in a legally indefensible position."

(THIS SIDEBAR ACCOMPANIES STORY)

Illegal Actions

Here is the list of illegal actions by coalition forces including Canada's as cited in John McNamer's five-page brief:

*Illegal abuses: Arbitrary arrests and detentions above and beyond the reach of law, sometimes for extended periods. Abuses include forced nudity, hooding and sensory deprivation, sleep and food deprivation, forced squatting and standing for extended periods, sexual abuse, beatings, torture and use of force resulting in death.

*Collusion with U.S. forces in illegal renditions: Coalition forces act in support of the covert practice of kidnapping suspects and delivering them to countries known to use torture to extract information.

*Use of Canadian airspace for this purpose.

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Complete five-page brief "Canada's Military Role in Afghanistan Deeply Troubling" available on

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request.

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