

The “Canadian Ministers” of Hamid Karzai’s Afghan government

Guy Charron
4 July 2007

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has deployed a Strategic Advisory Team (SAT) composed of some 15 people to Kabul with the mandate of working “directly with the Afghan government” to impose the neo-colonial agenda of the western powers.

Canada is a key participant in the US-NATO military occupation of Afghanistan and a bulwark of the US-installed puppet government of Hamid Karzai—a government composed of warlords guilty of horrific crimes against the Afghan people and that is detested by many both for its corruption and for being in Washington’s pocket. The CAF participated in the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and since the summer of 2005 has been in the forefront of the fight against the Taliban insurgency in the country’s south.

Dubbed “Operation Angus” by the CAF, SAT’s role complements and broadens Canada’s role in propping up the Karzai government. Despite its military origins, SAT exerts principally a political function. In the words of the Canadian Ministry of Defence, “the teams are embedded in their partner Afghan Government ministries and agencies.” Explains Lieutenant-Commander Rob Ferguson, one of SAT’s members, “No other country is as strategically placed as Canada with respect to influencing Afghanistan’s development.”

SAT’s mandate comes not from NATO, nor from the International Security Assistance Force. Rather it is the product of a bilateral agreement between Kabul and Ottawa and, consequently, SAT reports directly to the Canadian government.

Canadian military, political and economic leaders have lavishly praised the team as an example to follow in coordinating different sections of the Canadian state in foreign military interventions. These interventions are invariably dressed up in humanitarian guise, but are aimed at asserting and defending the global interests of the Canadian elite.

Lieutenant-colonel Fred Aubin, assistant to the SAT commander, sees the body as the embryo of a larger initiative by the Canadian government. “The Afghan

government is very cooperative with this initiative,” he says. “At some stage I’m sure they are going to enlarge [SAT] and there will be an increase in civilian members as the security situation improves.”

It is difficult to obtain information about SAT. Only since the end of 2006 and with the aim of blunting popular opposition at home to the military intervention in Afghanistan has the Canadian military provided more than the most rudimentary information about SAT’s activities.

According to internal CAF documents recently made public, “The aim of this communications plan is to demonstrate to the people of Canada the contribution the SAT is making to the long-term development of Afghanistan, while maintaining the institutional credibility of the SAT in the eyes of the Afghan government and people.”

That the information being released by Canadian authorities is tailored to the propaganda needs of the government and military can be readily demonstrated. Newly-released CAF documents show that SAT was formed on the initiative of the Canadian Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier; yet the press releases of the Ministry of National Defence insist that the SAT was established at the request of the Afghan government.

Despite the limited character of the information in the public domain, it is possible to establish some facts beyond a doubt: First and foremost, that a Canadian group is working at the highest levels of the Afghan government, in close contact with the office of Afghan President Karzai.

In his book *Canada in Afghanistan*, Peter Pigott, a civil servant in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, states that SAT is “mandated by President Karzai personally to go anywhere in the country and investigate anything... to work at the ministerial level across all ministries and deal with the United Nations, the World Bank, key donor nations, and NATO/ISAF on almost a daily basis.” The key donor nations include among others the US, Japan, and India.

The SAT team is principally comprised of army officers who specialize in planning, but also includes Canadian

Embassy attachés. An internal CAF document states that “Foreign Affairs Canada, through the Ambassador in Kabul, is heavily engaged in SAT activities while the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has seconded a development expert to the team.”

Afghanistan is the principal beneficiary of Canadian foreign aid and is now home to one of Canada’s largest embassies. Over and above the \$4 billion spent on military operations, Canada has given over \$100 million to Afghanistan annually in aid since 2001, and there are plans for this level of annual expenditure to continue until at least 2011. In addition to the aid money, which makes Canada one of Afghanistan’s largest foreign donors, other government agencies, such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, are assisting the development of Afghan’s security forces and prison system.

SAT members are embedded in a number of Afghan government ministries. Its members work with the Afghan Minister of Justice in developing laws and with the Afghan government in developing its strategic communication plan both within the country and internationally. It is SAT which organized and guided trips to Canada by Karzai and other Afghan officials.

SAT’s most important function is to monitor and supervise the Afghan government in implementing the terms of the “Afghanistan Compact,” an agreement that SAT and the Canadian ambassador helped draw up. Negotiated under UN auspices at the end of 2005 and formalized on January 31, 2006, the “Afghanistan Compact” provides the framework for collaboration between the Afghan government and the “international community” for the next five years.

A reading of the “Afghanistan Compact” makes it clear that the Central Asian country is to remain a NATO protectorate for years if not decades to come, and to be dependent for its security and the financing of its government on the imperialist powers. The measures stipulated by the “Afghanistan Compact” are aimed at creating a social, political and economic environment favourable to foreign investment and to the geo-strategic goals of the countries occupying it today.

In implementing the “Afghanistan Compact,” SAT works in close collaboration with Ishaq Nadiri, an American economist of Afghan origin who is Karzai’s principal economic advisor, and with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which receives the majority of foreign aid.

The creation of a special military unit whose role is to “lead from behind [the scenes]”, to use the words of one of its members, is consistent with the 2005 transfer of Canadian troops from Kabul, where they had no real combat role, to

Kandahar.

The Canadian government and elite concluded that Canada did not receive sufficient influence and great-power recognition from the CAF’s intervention in Bosnia in the late 1990s. “We did not have a decisive influence or decisive effect that led to good influence for Canada in the Balkans,” General Hillier told *Jane’s Defence Weekly* in a 2006 interview. Canadian missions abroad, declared the head of the CAF, need “to have sufficient credibility that [they give] us the opportunity to get leadership appointments and to influence and shape regions and populations in accordance with our interests and in accordance with our values.”

The CAF’s role in the Kandahar region, one of the bastions of the Taliban and of the armed opposition to the US-NATO occupation, is precisely the type of operation which gives “credibility” to the Canadian government in pressing for greater international influence.

Former Chief of the Defence Staff General Hénault, who is currently president of the Military Committee of NATO, gave the following assessment in his May 31, 2007 testimony before the Canadian Parliamentary Committee on National Defence: “[Canada is] a nation that’s seen at the leading edge of leadership and capability in Afghanistan.”

The Canadian military operation in Afghanistan is considered by the ruling elite to be a mission that gives Canada leverage in the “Great Game” being played out in Afghanistan for geo-political influence in Central Asia. A major producer of oil, natural gas, uranium and hydro-electric power, Canada aspires to be an “energy superpower” and therefore has a powerful interest in the fate of the oil reserves of the Caspian Sea region. In addition, Afghanistan’s mineral deposits are of great interest to Canadian companies active in the mining sector.

Canadian soldiers are being used as cannon fodder to earn for the Canadian elite the “blood prize” of “respect” from the great powers and at great cost to the Afghan civilian population who face the military, economic and political subjugation of their country. Meanwhile, Canada is fielding a group which aims to wield ministerial-type authority within the Karzai government, in order to influence and shape the region in accordance with the economic and strategic interests of Canadian big business.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact