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## THE RUXTED GROUP'S SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT PANEL ON CANADA'S FUTURE ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

The [Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan](#) invited public submission because, it said: "An important contribution to their analysis is input from the public." The Ruxted Group made a submission. Here it is:

### **The Ruxted Group's Submission to the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan**

The Ruxted Group<sup>1</sup> consists of people with interest in and knowledge of foreign policy, national security and defence issues. The Group has a distinctly military flavour, many of its members having had lengthy military careers. Membership is voluntary and by invitation only. The Ruxted Group is totally self-supporting; members provide all the required effort and resources (mainly a presence on the World Wide Web). The Ruxted Group aims to add its informed opinions to the national debates about foreign policy, national security and defence issues.

The Ruxted Group believes Canada's ongoing mission in Afghanistan must be seen in a broader context of Canadian vital interests.

We believe that Prime Minister Jean Chrétien committed Canadian troops because it was in Canada's best interests. A real, substantial and substantiated threat<sup>2</sup> to Canada's national security was and is present. Various sub-national groups and movements, like Al-Qaeda, have declared war on the secular, liberal, democratic West, including Canada.<sup>3</sup>

To quote Prime Minister Paul Martin, Canada continued the Afghanistan mission because: "If we are to take our responsibilities seriously to ourselves and the Canadian generations to follow, then we must take our responsibilities to the global community seriously as well, not only with noble sentiment and rhetoric—we must also earn and perhaps re-earn our way ... we are now in a position to reinvest in our international role. For decades, there was a slow erosion in Canada's commitment to its military, to international assistance and to our diplomatic presence around the world ... Now is the time to rebuild for Canada an independent voice of pride and influence in the world."<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Prime Minister Stephen Harper confirmed that the government is seeking a leadership role for Canada and that the Afghanistan mission and the military casualties which attend it are part of the price of that leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, citing the Honourable John Manley in a recent book, reported that Canada's vital interests being protected were not all related to any military mission - keeping the US border open was the top priority after 11 September 2001.<sup>6</sup> The Government of Canada's '3D Strategy' confirms this conclusion as only one of the Ds, "Development," is 'for' Afghanistan. The other two, Diplomacy and Defence, are in pursuit of Canada's interests.

In Canada, the Afghanistan mission has become the pawn and victim of the worst sorts of political partisanship. As the Ruxted Group has pointed out in a recent online editorial<sup>7</sup>, a vital national strategic debate has been sidetracked by casualties. The Ruxted Group is deeply saddened by these casualties: many of the fallen are members of our close-knit regimental families; some were personal friends. We, with Prime Minister Harper, accept the loss of our friends because they fought and died in the service of their country, in pursuit of its vital interests. We object to their sacrifice being hijacked for partisan political gain. We believe that our soldiers are analogous to tools – sometimes they are roughly used to finish a tough job. Sadly, the focus of debate in Canada has shifted away from the job at hand and to the tool box. That must change.

We agree with NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer that "Development and nation-building [in Afghanistan] is a matter of at least a generation, if not generations."<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan is one of the most unfortunate countries on earth; a generation of war plus the ravages of the Taliban have pushed it farther and farther away from being a stable and productive member of the community of nations. Failing at the 'nation building' task will send a message to our enemies that if they can find and subvert another failed state then they may be able to build a new base to conduct

another failed state then they may be able to build a new base to conduct operations against the West. Failure will also send the message to other failing states: the rich, powerful West is no match for committed organizations willing to employ terror. A precipitous Canadian withdrawal, made on the basis of a few dozen casualties over more than five years of operations, will, very likely, seriously weaken NATO's resolve to rebuild Afghanistan or come to the aid of other failed states, like Sudan.

Canadians have broadly embraced the idea of 'Responsibility to Protect,' on an ideological level at least, but if it is to mean anything at all a rich, sophisticated and advanced country like Canada must act on its responsibility to a poor, blighted and - in some ways - backwards Afghanistan.

We believe that Canada's mission in Afghanistan is a just war, A Good War, one worthy of the fight.<sup>9</sup> We are in Afghanistan for valid, easily defensible reasons: to further our own vital interests and to help the Afghan people. Canada should not abandon the fight until we have done enough of both.

Canada does not belong in Afghanistan for some sort of 'long haul'. We do not want a repeat of the UN in the Middle East, where Canadians are still peacekeeping after more than 50 years.<sup>10</sup> Afghanistan need not be a repeat of the Cyprus mission which consumed an infantry battalion year after year for about 30 years. But, Afghanistan may require our help for more than just a decade and we will no doubt maintain a close relationship once our work is done, with Afghanistan standing on its own among the rest of the world's nations.

With regard to the four options outlined in the Panel's Terms of Reference:

**1. To continue training the Afghan army and police so that Canada can begin withdrawing its forces in February 2009**

Canada can begin to withdraw some forces before 2009. The important question is: when can we withdraw most of our combat forces? We believe that this will not occur in 2009 and, assuming the Afghanistan Compact is renewed or replaced, not in 2011, either.

**2. To focus on reconstruction and have forces from another country take over security in Kandahar**

This is a wonderful idea but it is based on an unsound planning assumption.

The United Nations Director of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has identified some of the criteria preventing a successful peacekeeping mission from being conducted at this time<sup>[sup]11[/sup]</sup>. One factor is: "... several of the world's most capable militaries and strong economies are either heavily committed—mostly in Iraq and Afghanistan—or for other reasons, such as reduced defense spending, are choosing not to contribute troops ..." If such capable militaries are unavailable for UN peacekeeping we can safely assume they are equally unavailable to replace Canada's forces in Kandahar.

**3. To shift Canadian security and reconstruction efforts to another region in Afghanistan**

This is a minor restatement of "...have forces from another country take over security in Kandahar." Someone has to provide security for Afghanistan's most important province. Now and for the foreseeable future, national caveats of other NATO forces in Afghanistan prevent them from even reinforcing coalition forces in Regional Command-South, so 'someone' is Canada. We can choose to do the job, or not. There is no other useful option that would maintain a reasonable International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in southern Afghanistan able to continue the fight.

**4. To withdraw all Canadian military personnel except a minimal force to protect aid workers and diplomats**

While theoretically possible, this option is not feasible given the current security situation. Aid workers will not go where security is inadequate and, absent the support of a strong Canadian combat force for a few more years, the Afghan National Army cannot provide that. This course of action promotes a Taliban victory and Afghanistan's return to the status of failed state.

The Ruxted Group proposes a fifth option.

The general idea is to shift Canada's presence from military to non-military, drawing down the military component in consonance with the mounting capability of Afghan forces to secure Kandahar. Canada should retain responsibility for security, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and training of Afghan security forces (army and police) based in Kandahar. Canada, through the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, should adapt the composition of the Canadian commitment based on the situation on the ground. As the security situation improves or the balance of security effort shifts to Afghan forces, Canada's civilian and reconstruction resources should be increased. It is a strategy to exploit comparative advantage: Afghans undertake more of what they must, at minimum, be capable of - security - while Canada ramps up more of what Afghans currently do not do as well - development. As the Canadian focus shifts, the developmental benefits should accelerate.

Judging how quickly or slowly Canada's presence shifts from predominantly-military to predominantly-development should be determined by progress toward what the Ruxted Group considers 'victory conditions'.

The Ruxted Group is persuaded that the victory conditions in Afghanistan will be achieved when the people of Afghanistan can make their own decisions in their own way, even when they decide on policies with which we disagree - always bearing in mind that Canada, and the world, cannot accept a country's decision to turn itself into a base for aggressive war. The victory conditions will be achieved when the Afghans can elect a government - even if it is a government which we do not much like. The victory conditions will be achieved when the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police are able to contain insurgencies - home-grown and foreign.

We believe that success reinforces itself and we believe that the Afghan National Army needs to succeed in its battles with the Taliban and other insurgents.

In our view, the best way to help the Afghan National Army to succeed soon, and on a regular basis, is to strengthen it by integrating Canadian combat forces into Afghan National Army 'kandaks' (battalions) even as the Canadian battle group is drawn down. However, it will not be sufficient to move a Canadian rifle company, for example, from the Canadian battle group to a combined Afghan/Canadian (AFCAN) kandak. Initially, an extra Canadian company must be added to the AFCAN kandak and then, perhaps three to six months later, a company may be withdrawn from the Canadian battle group and added to another kandak. The Canadian battle group would be drawn down as the AFCAN units were beefed up.

The Afghan National Army needs more than just integrated Canadian combat sub-units. It needs more and better training and mentoring. This is ongoing, but must increase in quantity (number of people) and quality - more Canadian effort. The ANA needs more and better equipment - not necessarily the most sophisticated equipment, such as we deem suitable for Canadian soldiers, but simple, abuse-tolerant equipment, easy to operate and maintain. Some of the NATO nations unable or unwilling to provide combat troops to the dangerous southern provinces could provide money and equipment to the Afghan National Army (either by request or, if need be, by being shamed into it). The ANA needs sophisticated logistical support from their allies, which the Afghan National Army will have trouble providing itself in the short term due to the lack of educated personnel in Afghanistan, in general, and the Afghan National Army in particular.

The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) - which is also scheduled to depart in 2009 - needs to be reinforced and remain in place but with different security arrangements. It needs to be reinforced with money - the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), it is reported<sup>12</sup>, has been less than fully effective, and has been unable to spend money allocated to development. We are confident the small, un-bureaucratic PRT can, efficiently and effectively, spend the money. Money for projects which help people is a key component of counter-insurgency - winning a counter-insurgency campaign is rather like winning a popularity contest, and money matters. The ability of a PRT to move freely on the ground allows them to identify high impact projects which might not be obvious to people who are operating at a distance. The provision of a garbage truck to the Mir Wais Hospital in Kandahar City is one example of the type of work the PRT

is capable of, and many more can be found on the KPRI website. The first 'ready' AFCAN kandak should be assigned the achievable task of providing security for the PRT – allowing the Afghans to achieve some early successes, and the Canadians to withdraw some combat troops.

Another major, but lower profile, success story has been the Canadian Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan<sup>14</sup> (SAT-A). If one of the victory conditions is an Afghanistan where people can make their own decisions in their own way, it makes sense to continue using Canadian expertise to help the Afghan government develop effective governance, management and administrative capacity to carry out the wishes of the Afghan people. Canada's SAT-A needs to be retained and expanded. It is in Canadian - and international - interests to positively influence the development of Afghanistan's institutions.

Canada cannot, by itself, secure victory in Afghanistan but can and should lead other smaller and middle powers in the vital task of putting Afghanistan on the path to its own, self-directed peace and security.

We can do that by telling Afghans and Canadians and the world that we will not abandon Afghanistan, nor will we allow our own security to be held hostage by terrorists. We must keep our promises and we must use our influence to ensure others do the same.

It is, sadly, too soon to wind down the combat aspects of the mission. The Taliban and the other insurgents are fighting back so hard because we are succeeding. Ordinary Afghans can see and are telling Canadians<sup>15</sup> that we are making a difference in their lives - that they would rather have us, foreign troops, there than the Taliban.

In short: we are winning, but, as intelligence and counter-insurgency specialist Richard Clutterbuck wrote of the successful campaign in Malaya, it is going to be "A long, long war."<sup>16</sup>

Canadians need to understand that our mission in Afghanistan is a good one: it is good for Afghanistan, and it is good for Canada. The casualties, while regrettable, are actually fairly light when compared to casualties sustained during the world wars or Korea. As Prime Minister Harper said, they represent the price of leadership.

The Government of Canada, under the leadership of three Prime Ministers, has done a poor job educating Canadians about Afghanistan: the place, the people, the problem, and what Canada is doing for and about them. Most Canadians are not well informed about why we went to Afghanistan, why we are still there and, least of all, why we should stay. According to the Government of Canada's communications policy<sup>17</sup>, "Ministers are the principal spokespersons of the Government of Canada .... Ministers present and explain government policies, priorities and decisions to the public. Institutions .... focus their communication activities on issues and matters pertaining to the policies, programs, services and initiatives they administer." In terms of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, this means it is the job of Ministers (led by the Prime Minister) to explain the "why" to Canadians, and the job of Canadian Forces officials to explain the "how".

The Ruxted Group believes that Canada can and should return to its status as a leading middle power. We suspect that many, possibly even most Canadians agree. We encourage the Panel to do what successive governments have failed to do: provide Canadians with a clear, concise rationale for doing what we promised in Afghanistan, and a plan for accomplishing that laudable goal within a reasonable period and in accordance with clearly outlined "victory conditions".

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1. <http://ruxted.ca/>

2. <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=e9f20f44-ec19-470c-9ac3-6c79218d4d91>  
National Post article, Al-Qaeda warns Canada, by Stewart Bell, dated 28 Oct 06

3. We do not believe there is a single, unified enemy against which we can wage a 'War on Terror.' We see many, only loosely connected, local wars – some explicitly against the West and its influence while in others the West is a secondary enemy.

4. <http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/ips/ips-overview2-en.aspx> Government of Canada: Canada's International Policy Statement, A Role of Pride and Influence in the World, Foreword from the Prime Minister, tabled in Parliament in April 2005

5. <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/10/06/harper-leadership.html> CBC News story, Soldiers' deaths in Afghanistan the price of leadership: Harper, dated 6 Oct 06

6. Janice Goss Stein and Eugene Lang, The Unexpected War, Toronto, 2007, p. 6

7. <http://ruxted.ca/index.php/?archives/86-Seventy.html> Ruxted Group article, Seventy, dated 11 Sep 07

8. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20071024.wdehoopscheffer1024/BNStory/Afghanistan/home> Globe and Mail article, Afghan rebuilding a task for a 'generation', by Alan Freeman, dated 25 Oct 07

9. <http://ruxted.ca/index.php/?archives/55-A-good-war.html> Ruxted Group article, A good war, dated 22 Apr 07

10. [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/operations/jade/index\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/operations/jade/index_e.asp) DND/Operation Jade

11. <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q6.htm>

12. Lang and Stein, The unexpected war, Toronto, 2007, pps 265-280

13. [http://www.dnd.ca/site/kprt-eprk/act\\_e.asp](http://www.dnd.ca/site/kprt-eprk/act_e.asp)

14. [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=1703](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703)

15. <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/10/18/afghan-poll.html> CBC News story, 51% of Afghans feeling good about country's direction: poll, dated 18 Oct 07

16. Richard Clutterbuck, The long, long war, London, 1966

17. [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/Pubs\\_pol/sipubs/comm/comm02\\_e.asp#\\_Toc13752342](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/Pubs_pol/sipubs/comm/comm02_e.asp#_Toc13752342) Communications Policy of the Government of Canada

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