

AFGHANISTAN

Double time, NATO leaders

Listen to your commanders - the time has passed for modest troop increases

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The daily reports from Afghanistan are not encouraging. By most or all measures, NATO forces are losing the initiative while the Taliban and its allies within the criminal elements, particularly the drug trade, are picking up the pace of attacks. The argument that NATO's modestly increased ground strength over the past year would provide more opportunities for battlefield contacts with the insurgents makes sense, but is not entirely convincing.

After each of three visits to Afghanistan since 2002, I have opined that another 20,000 troops were needed in the country's three southern provinces to speed up completion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's mission. Some critics were outraged and suggested this was unreasonable.

To this point, NATO military commanders have repeated the politically acceptable opinion that they have enough troops on the ground to successfully complete the mission, at least until they turn over command and return home to a more media-permissive environment. But instead of focusing on modest additions to the strength of the International Security Assistance Force (such as the additional thousand troops Canada has demanded in exchange for staying in Kandahar until 2011), the alliance's political leaders should be paying attention to their military commanders.

Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently said he has immediate need for three more brigades, about 11,000 troops. And General Egon Ramms, the German head of Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum, Netherlands, has said European countries should provide an additional 5,000 to 6,000 troops.

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U.S. General Dan McNeill, who recently relinquished command of ISAF, announced that he was handing over an "under-resourced force." He said in no uncertain terms that he needed more manoeuvre units. During a meeting in March, he said the minimum requirement in the south alone was three brigades. He also stressed he needed more flying machines, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. In total, Gen. McNeil has repeatedly said he needed well over 400,000 security personnel for the entire country.

Retired Canadian General Terry Liston prepared an extensive analysis of NATO's troop requirements for this spring's edition of *On Track*, the magazine of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute. Using an internationally accepted ratio of at least 20 forces per 1,000 population to defeat an insurgency, the Afghan mission could easily justify 640,000 troops and police officers. The current strength, counting Afghan and international forces, is about 218,000 - a mere one-third of the requirement. By comparison, the same formula applied to Iraq would demand 550,000 security personnel. The number actually available for security duties there is 712,000!

NATO members and 14 other countries currently have about 53,000 troops in Afghanistan. The U.S. maintains another 13,000 in the eastern part of the country under Operation Enduring Freedom. That sounds like 66,000 troops to root out the Taliban - but it's not. Almost every one of the 40 countries involved has its own national headquarters, logistics and communications. The larger contingents also maintain personnel to deal with medical welfare, media, legal, engineering and civil-military issues, among others. There are also home-leave programs, which can see 20

with medical, welfare, media, legal, engineering and civil military issues, among others. There are also home leave programs, which can see 20 per cent of a contingent absent from theatre at any given time, and caveats for some forces that preclude actual combat. In short, I would estimate that the ISAF commander has fewer than 20,000 fighters to counter an insurgency in a country as big as Alberta and with as many people as all of Canada.

The 26 NATO countries have more than three million military personnel eligible to serve in Afghanistan, but the majority of these countries have 1 per cent or fewer of those soldiers serving. The NATO charter's Article 5 states that an attack against one is an attack against all - the article's drafters probably never thought that in the 21st century, members would hide behind democratic processes, blaming opposition parties for token contributions.

If you are invited to a knife fight, take a gun. The time has passed for meetings, conferences and conference calls discussing modest troop increases. Lives are being needlessly sacrificed because NATO has deployed inadequate numbers of troops. Twenty thousand more soldiers are immediately needed in the south alone to do the job properly. Generating these reinforcements is the sole responsibility of the alliance's civilian leadership.

The 25 other NATO leaders should not be looking to the United States, which has provided more troops than the rest combined. They should have a close look at their own contributions - and except for a few exceptions, such as Britain and Canada, they shouldn't like what they see.

Lewis MacKenzie's new book,

Soldiers Made Me Look Good,

will be published in September.