

# Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism

POL 5577

Professor Dan Middlemiss

April 3, 2007

**Sean Clark**

Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Foreign Policy Studies  
Ph.D Student and Sessional Lecturer, Dalhousie University  
[sn861357@dal.ca](mailto:sn861357@dal.ca)

**Abstract:**

This paper asks the question: ‘Why is Canada in Afghanistan, and given these reasons, how long are we going to stay?’ In light of the evidence, as informed by realist political economy scholarship, the mission can most aptly be described as a moral project aiming to rebuild a shattered country, rather than an exercise in the elimination of an existential threat. The result is that domestic politics will play a key role in the endurance of Canada’s commitment. Canada therefore faces the paradox of moral imperialism: while combat is necessary to implement imperial will—an activity which, because of the democratization of technology and violence, is likely to incur considerable casualties—imperial projects that are predominately inspired or sustained by humanitarian considerations face a public highly sensitive to loss. In an anarchical world dominated by self-interest, *moral* imperial projects are simply unable to endure significant casualties. Such losses entail a decline in public support, leaving governments with diminishing political capital in exchange for little gain. The result is clear: no matter how beneficial the project may be to the Afghan people, nor how receptive the Canadian public is to the psychic benefits of doing ‘good’ on the world stage, if Canadian forces continue to sustain high casualty rates, Canada will not remain in Afghanistan for much longer.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Today, Canadian troops are engaged in the most sustained, intensive combat the military has seen in 50 years.<sup>1</sup> While the level of resources expended in Canada's Afghanistan mission may be small by historical standards,<sup>2</sup> the recent increase in the ferocity of the fighting—and the subsequent steady stream of Canadian coffins flown home—has been accompanied by a reinvigorated public debate. Given the intensity of this discussion, it is clear that there exists considerable discord as to why Canadian forces have been committed and how long they shall remain deployed overseas.

This paper asks the question: 'Why is Canada in Afghanistan, and given these reasons, how long are we going to stay?' An answer to this query can only be found if the underlying causal forces for Canada's involvement have been accurately elucidated. In light of the evidence, as informed by realist political economy scholarship, Canada's efforts in Afghanistan do not significantly contribute to the protection of the nation's core productive base. As such, the mission can be most aptly described as a moral project aiming to rebuild a shattered country, rather than an exercise in the elimination of an existential threat. The result is that domestic politics will play a key role in the endurance of Canada's commitment.

---

<sup>1</sup> March 2006's firefight in the Sangin River Valley was arguably the Canadian Army's deadliest battle since a 1974 battle in Nicosia, Cyprus (two Canadians were killed), and the most sustained Canadian combat since the 15 hour battle for the Medak Pocket in Croatia, where Canadian forces took no casualties, but killed 27 Croats. Christie Blatchford, "How Pte. Costall died," *Globe and Mail*, (March 30, 2006), available at [www.globeandmail.com](http://www.globeandmail.com). The security situation in southern Afghanistan continued to deteriorate throughout the summer. By the arrival of fall, fighting in the Panjwayi became so ferocious that the operation became the first brigade-sized battle in NATO's history. *The Economist*, "NATO takes the field," (September 5, 2006), available at [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

<sup>2</sup> Canada's current deployment of 2,500 soldiers sits slightly below the 3,323 participants involved with the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. In total, over 10,000 Canadian have served in-theatre, a number resembling the 7,368 deployed to South Africa during the 1899-1902 Boer War. Casualty figures are also remarkably similar. To date, 60 Canadian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan, comparable to the 38 killed in the 1885 Rebellion and 89 in the South African campaign. John Colombo, Ed, *Canadian World Almanac: 1988*, (Toronto: Global Press, 1987), 401, and CBC, "Afghanistan, by the numbers," (November 9, 2006), available at [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca). The latter updated December 3, 2006 and June 25, 2007.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

The Canadian military therefore faces the paradox of moral imperialism: while combat is necessary to implement imperial will—an activity which, because of the democratization of technology and violence, is likely to incur considerable casualties—imperial projects that are predominately inspired or sustained by humanitarian considerations face a public highly sensitive to loss. In an anarchical world dominated by self-interest, *moral* imperial projects are simply unable to endure significant casualties. Such losses entail a decline in public support, leaving governments with diminishing political capital in exchange for little gain. The result is clear: no matter how beneficial the project may be to the Afghan people, nor how receptive the Canadian public is to the psychic benefits of doing ‘good’ on the world stage, if Canadian forces continue to sustain high casualty rates, Canada will not remain in Afghanistan for much longer.

### **Theoretical framework**

Realist political economy scholars note that in an anarchical world, a state’s paramount worry is survival.<sup>3</sup> Governments care about existential concerns—threats to the very survival of a nation’s productive base—above all else. Military force is used unsparingly to thwart such dangers. All other issues are subsumed to this primal necessity.<sup>4</sup> However, when a state is not in imminent existential danger, policymakers will concern themselves with the matters of relative international power, wealth, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Grieco agrees, arguing that states “are fundamentally concerned about their physical survival and their political independence.” *Cooperation Among Nations*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 10, 30.

<sup>4</sup> State viability and domestic welfare requires the protection of economic activity. Urs Luterbacher and Carla Norrlof, “Production, Protection, and International Relations,” paper presented at ECPR Conference, Canterbury, 18. More specifically, Canada’s recent *National Security Policy* states that the country’s “foremost security interest is to protect Canada and the safety and security of Canadians.” The government must “protect the physical security of Canadians, our values, and our key institutions.” Privy Council Office, *Securing an Open Society: Canada’s National Security Policy*, (April 2004), vii, elaborated 5-6.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

domestic political support.<sup>5</sup> Leaders attempt to maximize their gains by performing Grossman-Helpman equations,<sup>6</sup> balancing trade-offs in pursuit of the most beneficial outcome.<sup>7</sup> In foreign policy matters, self-interest is a motivator without parallel.

The consequence of rational states valuing their survival above all other interests is that the pursuit of national interests occurs at all turns. Moral considerations take a status distinctly subsidiary to the demands of existential survival, as well as more pressing relative international power, wealth, and domestic political concerns. International altruism is rarely pursued in isolation, and Canada's involvement in world politics is no exception. While its implications are sobering, use of this model can simplify policy analysis and distill clear objectives from the turbulent waters of international politics.

### **The Great Game Revisited: Canada in Central Asia**

Canada's military deployment to Afghanistan began as a response to the clear and present danger of al-Qaeda, illuminated by the horrors of September 11, 2001. Although this attack took place on American soil, the carnage left 24 Canadians dead and the entire nation reeling. In response, Canada immediately contributed forces to the US-led assault on al-Qaeda's Taliban-led, Afghanistan refuge. The country's innate survival imperative dictated an eradication of the threat, and as such, Canada's military participation in this operation should be viewed with little surprise. Canada acted as states have for millennia: it set out to destroy the enemy that had caused it harm.

---

<sup>5</sup> Krasner has a similar formulation, which emphasizes four basic state interests: aggregate national income, social stability, political power, and economic growth. Stephen Krasner, "State Power and the Structure of International Trade," *World Politics*, (April, 1976), 317-8.

<sup>6</sup> Gene Grossman and Elhanan Helpman, "Protection for Sale," *American Economic Review*, (September, 1994), 833-50.

<sup>7</sup> This follows Anthony Downs' assertions that "parties formulate policies in order to win elections," and that, once elected, "democratic governments act rationally to maximize political support." Cited from Niall Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 227.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

This survival instinct was given added impetus by a profound existential fear that was felt within both the public and policymakers themselves. Pronouncements of a ‘new age’ of international terrorism were common. An September 21, 2001 Ipsos Reid survey found that 55% of Canadians felt that international terrorists were lurking within Canada, waiting for an opportunity to strike.<sup>8</sup> An October 2001 poll found that 25% of Canadians were emotionally “overwhelmed” by the trauma of recent world events.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, this fear led to a common sense of belligerency, with 73% of respondents agreeing that that Canada should join America and declare war on international terrorism.<sup>10</sup> This combination of inherent security reflex and public sentiment ensured that Canada’s initial participation in the Afghanistan mission was overdetermined. September 11<sup>th</sup>’s act of catastrophic terrorism frightened both policymakers and the public to such a degree that Canadian military participation in the US-led invasion was a forgone conclusion.

Imperialism is the policy of extending a country’s power and influence by using diplomatic or military force. As such, the Afghanistan mission has been, from the very outset, a security-driven *imperial* project. Not only did Canada and its allies disrupt al-Qaeda<sup>11</sup> and drive the Taliban away, the Western powers also sat down to create a

---

<sup>8</sup> Ipsos Reid, “While Majority (73%) Agree...,” September 21, 2001. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).

<sup>9</sup> Ipsos Reid, “Stress Take Its Toll,” October 21, 2001. In addition, 35% of Canadians were more “anxious and irritable,” specifically because of uncertainty caused by terrorism and war, while 4% of adults admitted to having visited a doctor or professional counselor to help cope with feelings, physical or anxiety symptoms because of the threat of terrorism and war. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).

<sup>10</sup> Ipsos Reid, “Majority.”

<sup>11</sup> While Osama bin Laden and several other top leaders remain at large, the invasion of Afghanistan severely hampered al-Qaeda’s operational ability. Much of the its top leadership was either killed or captured, and the organization was dealt the “devastating loss of its sanctuary.” Daniel Byman, “Measuring the War on Terrorism,” *Current History*, (December, 2003), 5. In total, roughly two-thirds of al-Qaeda’s pre-Afghanistan invasion leadership has been killed or captured. Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Imperial Hubris*, (Washington: Brassey’s, 2004), 67-71. Moreover, bin Laden and his top fugitive lieutenants are no longer likely to be involved in the day-to-day operational planning of attacks against Canada and its

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

suzerainty amenable to their national interests. The Western alliance took advantage of an opportunity to ensure that Afghanistan could no longer harbour terrorist groups, from which they could conduct training, coordinate financing, and plan attacks against targets a half a world away.<sup>12</sup> In effect, the aim was to transform Afghanistan in such a manner that it would no longer pose an international threat—an effort hardly unique in the annals of empire.

Canadian involvement with the invasion of Afghanistan rested upon two primary imperatives: firstly, to eliminate an immediate security threat, and secondly, to eradicate those conditions that facilitated such a danger in the first place. In terms of the first imperative, with the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Canada faced an urgent and obvious threat to Canada and its citizens. In response, the government had little choice but to assist efforts to disrupt al-Qaeda's activities through the destruction of their bases of operation, lest the horrors of that fateful day be soon repeated. The second imperative—to end the long-term threat that a failed Afghan state poses—explains why Canada decided to participate in the rebuilding of the country. These efforts are part of a transformative project designed to disseminate democracy and prosperity, thereby preventing a regression of Afghanistan to 'failed' status, and thus eliminating a potential harbour for terrorists.

### **International Terrorism: An Existential Threat?**

So how long is Canada likely to remain committed to Afghanistan? How much blood and treasure is the Canadian public willing to expend in this imperial endeavour?

---

citizens. The government can rightly claim success in dealing with the immediate terror threat posed in the aftermath of 9/11.

<sup>12</sup> There is broad consensus within the government as to the dangers that failed or failing states pose. For example, the Department of National Defence's (DND) contribution to Canada's *International Policy Statement* argues that "Failed and failing states pose a dual challenge for Canada...these situations create an affront to Canadian values...[and] makes them potential breaking grounds or safe havens for terrorism and organized crime." Department of National Defence, *Canada's International Policy Statement: Defence*, (2005), 4. Both the Privy Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs share similar views.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Given the controversial nature of the Afghan mission,<sup>13</sup> political bargaining will likely play an important role in determining the length of Canada's participation, thus clouding prognostications with a degree of imprecision. There are, however, several underlying considerations and international realities that will have great influence on the length of Canada's deployment to Afghanistan.

Foreign policy decisions are made according to a bi-level process. At the primary, or state survival level of analysis, there has been a great subsiding of existential fears. As time has passed from September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Canadian public has greatly reduced its preoccupation and concern with the threat of catastrophic international terrorism. While few argue that the danger has disappeared entirely, the saliency ascribed to this threat has fallen along with its immediacy. Terrorism threat perceptions are predicated upon a sense of vulnerability, and this anxiety diminishes as the distance from an incident increases. For example, one year after the 9/11 attacks, 84% of Canadians agreed that their life had returned to normal. Only 40% reported a lasting impact in their behaviour or activity.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, by November 2001, health care concerns had increased 14 points to overtake terrorism as the nation's most pressing issue.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, less than two months after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks shocked the world, Canadians were more concerned with the financial health and maintenance records of the nation's airlines, than the threat of terrorism to domestic flights.<sup>16</sup> So long as September 11<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Note, for example, 2006's fall in public support for the mission, as well as the concomitant raucous debates in the House of Commons.

<sup>14</sup> Compared to an October poll, terrorism fell 7% to 33%. Ipsos Reid, "Life Normal After Terrorism," September 2002. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).

<sup>15</sup> Ipsos Reid, "Health Care (36%) Increases..." November 22, 2001. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com). By

<sup>16</sup> Ipsos Reid, "The Financial Health of Airlines..." November 18, 2001. The percentages of Canadians concerned were 66% for airline bankruptcy, 62% for proper maintenance, and 52% for the threat of terrorism on flights. Also of note is that less than a month after 17 people were arrested in connection with a Toronto-area terrorist plot, only 36% of Canadians were concerned that themselves, a friend, or a relative

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

fades into the past—and is not replaced by a similar incident involving Canadian citizens—international terrorism is unlikely to be considered an overwhelming threat to the nation’s core productive base. The level of public fear that helped propel Canadian forces into Afghanistan is simply no longer there.

Not only does time calm terrorism’s existential fears, but so too does objective analysis. Those who argue that terrorism can mount a serious challenge to a state’s core productive base—and thus jeopardize the state itself—miss the fact that these groups adopt such tactics for the very reason that they are so weak.<sup>17</sup> In fact, even the most nihilistic of terrorists are incapable of endangering a state’s survival. Terrorist organizations simply lack the ability to marshal the resources necessary to dramatically alter a modern nation’s long-run productive capacity, and are therefore incapable of posing existential challenges to a modern society.<sup>18</sup> While dangerous, the challenge terrorism poses is by no means irrepressible or overwhelming.

### **Calculations at the Secondary Level**

If existential fears are allayed, policymakers focus on the more nuanced secondary calculations of international power, wealth, and domestic political interests. Since Canada’s participation in Afghanistan is not driven by existential necessity,<sup>19</sup> the

---

would be victim of a future terrorist attack in Canada—of which only 7% were “very” concerned. CDFAI/Innovative, “CDFAI Media Poll,” June 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Terrorists adopt a diffuse organizational pattern for reasons of security and resource constraint. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus*, (London: Penguin, 2004), 127.

<sup>18</sup> Some argue that globalization and its dependence on critical international infrastructure provide ripe opportunities for terrorists to attack critical network nodes. However, the attacks on the World Trade Centre provide ample evidence that these economic structures are both resilient and highly redundant, for despite lower Manhattan’s towering presence in international finance, the September 11 attacks incurred insignificant long-term financial cost and did little to halt global commerce. American and global equity and currency markets quickly rebounded. R. Barry Johnson and Oana M. Nedelescu, “The Impact of Terrorism on Financial Markets,” IMF Working Paper, WP/05/06, 5-9.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, even the military and the government now preface their arguments in favour of continuing the mission by highlighting Canada’s moral contribution. For example, note the transition from Operation Apollo, which was Canada’s contribution to the “International Campaign Against Terrorism,” to Operation

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

length and characteristics of Canada's mission will be decided by policymaker maximization of these secondary considerations. The first concern, that of relative power, deals with security matters, such as the efficacy of troop deployment, and the maintenance of strong alliances and diplomatic ties. In terms of the former, the contribution of the Afghan mission to Canadian security is limited by several factors. Most obviously, Canada's immediate post-9/11 security threat has already been dealt with: al Qaeda has been scattered and its Taliban protectors overthrown. There is no evidence of international terrorist activity being directed from within the Kabul-controlled Afghan heartland, nor even the more disputed southern and eastern districts. Afghanistan is, at present, no longer the haven for the planners of 9/11 that it once was.

A further development has raised questions about the relevance of the Afghan mission to Canadian security. In many ways, the emergence of homegrown terrorism has changed the very nature of the terrorist threat facing Canada. In the years following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the structure of radical Islamic terror networks underwent a profound shift. While the attention of Western security officials was fixated on threats

---

Athena, where "Our mission is one of nation building." See DND/CF Backgrounder: "Canadian Forces Operations in Afghanistan," available at [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=1703#athena](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703#athena). Also, as part of a media relations drive, Defence Minister O'Connor recently asserted that "We cannot allow the Taliban to return to their former prominence, to take over Afghanistan and resume their regime of terror and tyranny, to flaunt their disregard for human rights, to punish and terrorize their own people, to murder innocents, to harbour those who would threaten us and our families at home and abroad." O'Connor buttressed his argument with the substantial development work that Canada has facilitated in Afghanistan—from building schools to the return of four million refugees. This viewpoint argues that the duties of being a good global citizen necessitate Canada's involvement, and that Canadian efforts in pursuit of this end have done much to improve the living conditions of the Afghani people. Jane Armstrong, "O'Connor on blitz to sell Afghan mission," *Globe and Mail*, (November 15, 2006), available at [http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061115.wxbcconnor15/BNStory/Afghanistan/?cid=al\\_gam\\_nletter\\_newsUp](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061115.wxbcconnor15/BNStory/Afghanistan/?cid=al_gam_nletter_newsUp). Interestingly, this view is also held by much of the army itself. The moral imperatives of the mission permeate the Canadian forces. For example, 21-year-old Private Ryan Hunt recently commented, amidst intense combat operations, that "All we want to do is help these dudes reconstruct their country." Damian Grammaticas, "On the front line in Afghanistan," *BBC News*, (September 16, 2006), available at [bbcnews.com](http://bbcnews.com). The moral component of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan plays heavily not only in attempts to garner broad-based public support for the mission, but is also used as the rationale to brave the theatre's considerable dangers by the soldiers themselves.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

abroad, a new, domestic challenge emerged. The most dramatic and lethal example of this transformation from foreign to homegrown terror networks was the July 7, 2005 transit attacks in London. In this incident, an independent cell of British citizens, operating without any overseas direction, boarded subway cars and a bus and blew up their fellow countrymen with suicide bombs. These men demonstrated that sanctuary in Afghanistan was no longer necessary for terror groups to bring their mass-casualty plots to fruition; a quiet flat in West Yorkshire proved sufficient.<sup>20</sup>

Frighteningly, this tactical innovation has not been limited to Britain. With the spring 2006 arrest of 17 individuals in Toronto on terror-related charges, it is now obvious that Canada faces the danger of homegrown terrorism itself. Allegedly motivated in part by Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, the group intended to take hostages on Parliament Hill and kill Prime Minister Harper unless he withdrew Canadian troops from Afghanistan and released all Muslims from the nation's prisons.<sup>21</sup> Again, no aid from abroad has been cited. Furthermore, at the time of the arrests, 58% of Canadians feel that many more potential terrorist groups exist in country.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, 57% of Canadians argue that the government should be more concerned about homegrown terrorists than terrorists from abroad.<sup>23</sup> Unlike during the days

---

<sup>20</sup> The BBC offers a detailed overview of this attack. "7 July Bombings," available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london\\_blasts/what\\_happened/html/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/what_happened/html/default.stm), accessed November 23, 2006. The "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005," (May 11, 2006, HC 1087) notes that several of the bombers had traveled to Pakistan and may have received some training, or a least inspiration, from Al Qaeda operatives. However, no evidence suggests that the operation was anything other than British-conceived, financed, and executed. See especially p20-23.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart Bell, "Al-Qaeda warns Canada," *National Post*, (October 28, 2006), available at [canada.com/nationalpost](http://canada.com/nationalpost).

<sup>22</sup> Ipsos Reid, "Canadians React In Wake of Terror-Plot Arrests," June 10, 2006, available at [www.ispos-na.com](http://www.ispos-na.com).

<sup>23</sup> In contrast, 25% of respondents cited overseas terrorists as the primary threat. CDFAI/Innovative Research Group, "Canadians more concerned about home grown terrorists than foreign terrorists," August, 2006, available at [www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org).

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

following September 11, it no longer seems obvious that the most salient terrorism dangers are located overseas.

Unfortunately, there is even reason to question the security utility of imperial projects themselves. In an age where empire is prohibitively expensive,<sup>24</sup> the toppling of governments and reconstitution of states makes for questionable counter-terrorism policy. As a grand project, such efforts are fatally flawed because of the immense resource requirements the subjugation of all potential terrorist-supporting states and regions would entail. As the West has recently learned, capturing an entire country for the sake of a few individuals imposes a steep cost curve, for relatively small benefit.<sup>25</sup> Imposing imperial will over an entire country requires considerably more effort than simply hunting down enemies from afar, and the concomitant provocation of local populations can actually facilitate terrorist recruitment. Given the incredible expense of imperial projects, they simply fail to offer a positive rate of return.

In fact, offensive operations abroad have also done little to remedy the blight of international terrorism. As witnessed by the subsequent attacks in Bali (2002), Madrid (2004), London (2005), Mumbai (2006), and the failed efforts in Glasgow and London (2007), the menace has yet to be eradicated. If anything, imperial operations abroad have actually increased the agitation of al-Qaeda and its supporters.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the Afghan

---

<sup>24</sup> The combination of cellular telephones and artillery shells have made the cost of occupation incredibly steep. Insurgents today have access to exponentially greater destructive capability than their forerunners of a century ago.

<sup>25</sup> Imagine, for example, if one of the many potential covert operations to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, discussed by American security officials prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, was both implemented and successful. One such plan included a raid by US special forces and was given a 95% chance of success, yet never implemented. 9/11 Commission, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 142-3.

<sup>26</sup> Scheuer argues that the American-led campaigns against the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's regime have created a toxic mix of Muslim anger and vitriolic outrage that simplify the enlistment efforts of radical Islamic groups. Anonymous, *Hubris*, 96, 214. Note also the April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate,

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

project continues with an uncertain future.<sup>27</sup> Although the north and west of Afghanistan have remained relatively peaceful, resistance to the Western-backed Karzai government has risen dramatically in the east and south.<sup>28</sup> Significant prosperity and growth in Kabul have been insufficient to stem the recent surge in rebel activity, as over 2,000 people have been killed in recent months, including more than 100 Western soldiers.<sup>29</sup> While bin Laden's network has been successfully disrupted, the military efforts in Afghanistan have, on the whole, hardly been cause for celebration.

Another consideration for policymakers is the empirical evidence indicating that the democratic prosperity model is unlikely to lead to a reduction in the threat terrorism presents. This raises further questions of the security utility of the Afghan project. The present strategy assumes that the dissemination of both democracy and prosperity will result in the eradication of the sources of antagonism that lead to attacks on the West. Regrettably, this postulate ignores politics, places impetuous hope in democratization,<sup>30</sup> and takes no account of recent research suggesting that poverty is not the root cause of terrorism.<sup>31</sup> Neither democracy<sup>32</sup> nor prosperity temper temptations towards religious extremism.<sup>33</sup>

---

which concluded that the invasion of Iraq, and its subsequent insurgency, are the leading inspiration for new Islamic extremist groups that are united by little more than an anti-Western agenda. Ultimately, the situation in Iraq has worsened America's position in its global counterterrorism struggle. Karen DeYoung, "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Hurting U.S. Terror Fight," *Washington Post*, (September 24, 2006), A01.

<sup>27</sup> To say nothing of Iraq.

<sup>28</sup> "Resistance Surges in the South," graphic accompanying Carlotta Gall, "After Afghan Battle, a Harder Fight for Peace," *New York Times*, (October 3, 2006), available at [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com).

<sup>29</sup> "NATO takes the field," *The Economist*, (September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006), available at [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Carothers, "Democracy: Terrorism's Uncertain Antidote," in *Current History*, December, 2003. Paul Collier, in "The Market For Civil War," *Foreign Policy*, (May/June, 2003), 40, agrees with this caution of democracy activists and notes that low-income societies with fledgling democratic institutions are often at an *enhanced* risk of armed insurgencies.

<sup>31</sup> Studies by Princeton economist Alan Krueger and others find no correlation between a nation's per capita income and terrorism. There is however, a link between a lack of civil liberties and terrorism. A recent National Research Council report finds that "[t]errorism and its supporting audiences appear to be fostered by policies of extreme political repression and discouraged by policies of responsibly

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Fair and Haqqani concur with this assessment, concluding there is “no evidence of a correlation between these social and economic ills and terrorism.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, poverty is pervasive, while terrorism is not. The world’s 50 poorest countries are hardly affected by terrorism. In India, terrorism has occurred in one of its most prosperous regions, Punjab, and its most egalitarian, Kashmir. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and North Africa, terrorists originate from some of those countries’ wealthiest regions and neighbourhoods.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, study of 14 Muslim countries found that the very poor were actually less likely to support terrorism. In fact, those who lack money for food espoused terrorism less than cell phone owners.<sup>36</sup> The possibility that poverty alleviation and improved access to education could reduce support for terrorism remains, but unfortunately, that link has yet to be established.

Finally, when policymakers deliberate matters of international power, they also pay heed to international diplomacy considerations. Any abrogation of Canada’s international commitments would seriously impact relations with its allies. Were Canada to abandon its Afghanistan mission and remove its troops from the frontlines, considerable strain would be placed on its Afghan, American, British, and Dutch partners. Canada’s relations with those nations would suffer accordingly.

---

incorporating both dissident and moderate groups into civil society and the political process.” Scott Atran, “Mishandling Suicide Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Summer, 2004), 74. One must remember, however, that the London suicide bombers lived the vast majority of their lives in an extremely tolerant, liberal democracy.

<sup>32</sup> The majority of Muslims who encourage suicide terrorism and trust bin Laden “favour elected governments, personal liberty, educational opportunities, and economic choice.” Atran, “Mishandling,” 67, 73.

<sup>33</sup> “Study after study demonstrates that suicide terrorists and their supporters are not abjectly poor, illiterate, or socially estranged.” Poverty and a lack of education are simply not the root causes of suicide terrorism. Atran, “Mishandling,” 75. See also 67, 73-77.

<sup>34</sup> C. Christine Fair and Husain Haqqani, “Think Again: Islamist Terrorism,” *Foreign Policy*, (January, 2006), available at [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com).

<sup>35</sup> Fair and Haqqani, “Think.”

<sup>36</sup> C. Christine Fair and Bryan Sheppard, “Who Supports Terrorism?,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29:51, 2006, 52, 55, 62.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

However, the extent of this deterioration may be somewhat limited. Amid 5-year highs in the violence, NATO called for more troops in early September 2006—and was largely ignored.<sup>37</sup> The reluctance of other nations to heed this call indicates that a failure to join the fray is hardly diplomatic suicide. Of 26 member nations, only Poland and Romania offered to significantly bolster their present Afghan deployment. Unfortunately, even these reinforcements are of rather dubious utility. The Polish government balked at a potential deployment to the dangerous south, even though this region is where additional forces are most desperately needed. Even NATO's newest, keenest members are unwilling to place their forces into harm's way.

Such combat reticence is hardly unusual. Germany's 2,750 soldiers have also been mandated by their government to avoid the more violent southern provinces. In fact, a British MP told the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* in November 2006 that during recent battles in the Panjwayi district, Canada requested aid from NATO allies stationed in the north and were denied. "Five NATO countries refused," he said, because of "national caveats" that prohibit them from engaging in combat.<sup>38</sup> While American, Canadian, and British casualties comprise 90% of the allied total, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain have been reluctant to offer assistance to the combat operations in the south. Tensions boiled over at a 2006 NATO meeting in Quebec City, where a British participant was quoted as saying that there are soldiers in Afghanistan who drink beer or tea, and there are soldiers who risk their lives.<sup>39</sup> Yet for all this consternation, in the 12 months following there has been no redeployment of Kabul-based forces to the south.

---

<sup>37</sup> Moore and Anderson, "NATO Faces," A10.

<sup>38</sup> *Der Spiegel*, "Afghanistan Testing NATO Alliance," (November 17, 2006), available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,449183,00.html>.

<sup>39</sup> *Speigel*, "Afghanistan."

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Again, despite the palpable strains within the alliance, other NATO countries have not felt significant repercussions for their refusal to do more. It is therefore likely that Canada could similarly retreat to less hostile regions and wait out its 2009 withdrawal date without any serious, long-term repercussions.

In sum, international power considerations, when viewed from both security and diplomatic perspectives, do not significantly encourage the long-term endurance of Canada's Afghanistan commitment. The mission's contribution to Canadian security is marginal at best—if not counterproductive. Over time, appeals to the mission's security rationale have been found wanting. Lacking logical and empirical evidence in favour of its efficacy, the Afghan mission is no longer sold and sustained on its security merits.

At the secondary level, policymakers also concern themselves with the maximization of wealth, which is measured in productivity, competitiveness, and profit. Clearly, the Afghan mission offers Canada very little in the way of direct financial inducements, nor is there significant potential for welfare gains resulting from international trade. The operation is an exercise in wealth outflow, as Afghanistan's small economy and weak institutions offer little profit opportunity for Canadian investment.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the financial cost of Canada's military and development contribution is considerable. In June 2006, Foreign Minister Mackay announced to the Commons defence committee that Canada's Afghanistan expenditure has amounted thus far to \$2.3 billion CAD.<sup>41</sup> By 2009, the government expects Canada to have spent a total

---

<sup>40</sup> Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) totals a mere \$20 billion USD, while Afghan-Canada trade consists of only \$618,889 CAD in Afghan exports to Canada, and \$9 million CAD in Canadian exports to Afghanistan. (2003 values). CBC, "CBC-Environics public issues poll," (November, 2006), available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/afghanistan-survey2006.html>.

<sup>41</sup> "Canada will spend more than \$3.5-billion by 2009," *Globe and Mail*, (June 7, 2006), available at [www.globeandmail.com](http://www.globeandmail.com).

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

of \$3.5 billion CAD on its effort to help Afghanistan rout the Taliban and restore effective government. Yet despite this seemingly consequential sum, given that overall government spending approaches some \$176.9 billion CAD annually—in an aggregate economy of \$1.2 trillion CAD<sup>42</sup>—the Afghanistan mission consumes a relatively minor portion of federal spending. Thus, while the Afghan mission does not advance Canada's aggregate wealth, the country is unlikely to be unduly burdened by the project's cost.

As Canada's Afghanistan commitment does little to impact the nation's security and economic concerns, the mission to rebuild the Afghan state therefore hinges upon domestic politics, or more specifically, popular support.<sup>43</sup> Such backing is garnered according to how well the mission furthers the public's interests of security, wealth, casualty minimization, and morality. Regarding the Afghan mission, the latter two are at play, with casualties taking a higher precedence than moral concerns.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the empirical record indicates that in the matter of imperial wars tangential to a nation's core interests, the level of mission approval is inversely related to the number of casualties incurred. Recent research into the 'battle casualty hypothesis' suggests that countries—

---

<sup>42</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook*, Available at <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>. Converted from \$152.6 billion USD and \$1.035 trillion USD to CAD in March 2007 (\$1 USD = \$0.8629 CAD).

<sup>43</sup> Were Canada's opponents in Afghanistan to pose an existential threat to Canada's core productive base, domestic considerations would matter little. For example, pre-Peloponnesian War Sparta and pre-World War I Germany were separated by almost 2,400 years, yet both faced the similar problem of an unstable domestic situation that war could only exacerbate. Despite conditions that would logically support an inclination towards peace, each state nonetheless chose war when the need to check its opponent was perceived. Dale Copeland, *Origins of Major War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 22. Moreover, despite internal disagreements, McNeil notes that "An enemy at the gates has always been the best substitute for spontaneous consensus at home," and that an "outside threat" is "most powerful cement known to humankind." William H. McNeil, *The Pursuit of Power*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 380, 382.

<sup>44</sup> This hierarchy has been repeatedly demonstrated by the international community's repeated willingness to provide aid to disaster regions, yet rarely commit soldiers to violent conflicts. The present crisis in Darfur provides a further case in point. Moreover, even without discussing casualties, a recent poll indicates that 48% of Canadians argue that aid to failing states should not come at the expense of areas such as domestic health and education. CDFAI/Innovative, "The World in Canada," (October 31, 2005), 7.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

democracies in particular—are not afraid of casualties per se, but rather are highly attuned to an operation’s benefits and costs.<sup>45</sup> A nation’s casualty sensitivity is directly related to the perceived profit of the exercise. The public weighs these gains, measured in security, wealth, and the psychic benefits of performing moral ‘good,’ against the financial cost and the loss of human life. If casualties are seen to outweigh gains, support for the military operation plummets.<sup>46</sup>

The most famous example of this dynamic is the Vietnam War. Mueller tracked the number of American casualties and compared them against the level of public approval for the war. The study found a stark inverse relationship between the death total of US servicemen and its popularity.<sup>47</sup> As America’s casualties mounted, the public’s confidence in the operation faltered. Nothing the US government did could halt this decline in popular support.<sup>48</sup> Eventually, America was forced to withdraw.

The Canadian public has demonstrated a similar sensitivity when faced with the violent resurgence of those opposed to the Western-backed, Afghan government. While largely concentrated in Afghanistan’s four southern provinces, 2006 saw a fourfold rise in insurgent activity. These groups now launch more than 600 attacks a month.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, there has been an ‘Iraqization’ of the conflict. Whether through personal

---

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Major Charles K. Hyde, “Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, 14:2 (Summer 2000), 17-27.

<sup>46</sup> This relationship often includes opposition casualties. For example, US bombing support in Kosovo fell 50% by the last week of the NATO operation. US television viewers were inundated with images of the destruction (some 1,500 Serbs were killed in the raids), amidst the reality that little progress was being made. US public approval of the war therefore plummeted. Ferguson, *Nexus*, 415-6.

<sup>47</sup> John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, (New York: Wiley, 1972), 45f, Table 3.1, reproduced in Ferguson, *Colossus*, 98-99.

<sup>48</sup> See also Mueller’s more recent “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs*, (November/December, 2005), 44-54.

<sup>49</sup> Armstrong, “O’Connor.” Insurgent and/or terrorist-related security incidents have increased from less than 300 per month by the end of March 2006, to over 600 by the end of September 2006—compared to the 2005 average of approximately 130 per month. Joint Coordinating and Monitoring Board, *Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact: Bi-Annual JCMB Report*, (November, 2006), 2.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

contacts or the Internet, tactics common in the Iraqi insurgency, such as roadside bombs and suicide vests, have been transmitted and adopted by the Afghan insurgents.<sup>50</sup> While suicide attacks were previously rare in Afghanistan, by the end of September 2006, Canada and its allies had been subject to more than 60—a number that has only increased as time has progressed. Afghanistan has once again become a ferocious theatre of operations.

The inevitable consequence of this surge in violence has been a dramatic rise in Canadian casualties. Four Canadians were killed at the war's outset in 2002, two in 2003, one in each of 2004 and 2005, followed by, most dramatically, 36 in 2006, and 27 thus far in 2007.<sup>51</sup> Afghani figures offer a similarly bleak picture. During the Taliban resurgence of 2006, the renewed violence directly resulted in over 3,700 fatalities—accounting for 89% of the 4,214 total deaths resulting from violent conflict in Afghanistan during that period, a rate four times greater than 2005.<sup>52</sup> In the regions affected by the upswing in violence, the imposition of a democratic Afghan state has become a bloody affair.

Accompanying the increase in violence has been a sharp drop-off in public support for Canada's mission. In January 2002, near the beginning of the Canadian deployment, Ipsos Reid found that 66% of Canadians supported the mission.<sup>53</sup> However, in the face of sustained Canadian casualties and the subsiding of terrorism fears, the

---

<sup>50</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Attacks in Afghanistan Grow More Frequent and Lethal," *New York Times*, (September 27, 2006), available at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>51</sup> Data compiled from CBC, "Canadian casualties around Kandahar," available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/gmaps/afghanistan/>, accessed September 2007, with additional reports accessed December 3, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Monitoring Board, *Report*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> World Public Opinion.org, "Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched by Expanded Military Role in Afghanistan," (May 26, 2006), available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/198.php?nid=&id=&pnt=198&lb=brusc>.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

number has plummeted. By May 2006 (the month when Canadian forces took over operations in Kandahar from the United States), approval had slipped to 57% in favour and 40% against. Even more dramatically, as Canadian forces sustained heavy casualties throughout 2006 and 2007, approval collapsed even further. According to the Strategic Counsel, by October 2007 a mere 36% of Canadians supported the mission.<sup>54</sup>

Commensurate with this growth in the casualty rate has been a drop-off in popular support for the mission. In fact, detailed examination of the casualty and polling data illuminates the intimate relationship between troop losses and mission approval.<sup>55</sup> For example, the March-April 2006, and August-September 2006 spikes in the monthly casualty total were accompanied by strong, downward pressure on the level of public support for the mission. Similarly, the reverse of this relationship is true: when these casualty rate surges retreated, public approval rebounded slightly. This relationship stands as clear evidence that casualties directly erode popular support for moral projects.

Polling of the Canadian public repeatedly demonstrates this trend. For example, Ekos Research Associates highlights a distinctly downward trend, with support dropping from 76% in September 2005, to 70% in February 2006, to 62% in April of that year. Strategic Counsel's data indicates similar movement: the March 2006 peak has been replaced by July 2007's 36%.<sup>56</sup> By October 2006, 55% of respondents said that the price

---

<sup>54</sup> During the past year, Canadian soldiers have been more than 3.5 times more likely to be killed in-theatre than their US counterparts in Iraq. Between January and November 2006, 36 Canadians and 703 Americans died in each conflict. Out of an average troop strength of 2,300 and 155,000 soldiers respectively, this equals annual death rates of 1.6% and 0.45%. Calculated from appendix and O'Hanlon & Kamp, *Iraq Index*, (Brookings Institution: November 30, 2006), 5, 20. More tellingly, the Canadian Forces has spent over \$1 million on funeral services for soldiers killed in Afghanistan. CBC, "Afghanistan: By the Numbers," accessed November 20, 2006, available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/bythenumbers.html>.

<sup>55</sup> For a graphic representation of the data, please see Appendix A.

<sup>56</sup> See the 'Public Approval' graph in the Appendix for a complete collection of these polls.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

being paid by Canada in Afghanistan is too high,<sup>57</sup> and 59% agreed that Canadian soldiers were “dying for a cause we cannot win.”<sup>58</sup> The view that Canadian lives were being risked for no apparent benefit jumped 12 points between June and October 2006, to 38%.<sup>59</sup> When asked in May whether or not they favoured Prime Minister Harper’s plan to extend the mission by two years, only 44% of the sample approved. More importantly, when asked in November 2006, only 34% of Canadians said they were convinced that the mission will be successful, and 59% argued Canada should leave before the 2009 mandate is completed.<sup>60</sup> Only 23% advocated that Canada remain until 2009, and an even fewer, 10%, felt Canada should remain beyond that date. Political support for a long mission, when measured amid high casualty rates, is minimal.

To counter this slide in support, the government and the military have dramatically increased their public relations campaigns. However, the results of similar strategies, when faced with high casualties incurred in a distant, tangential war, suggest that little will come from such efforts. For example, as preparations were made to move Canadian forces to the volatile Kandahar province, the government widely consulted with the public in regards to the nature of the mission and the new dangers the operation would face. A February 2006 Ekos poll found that these efforts paid off, with 60% of the public recognizing Canada’s new “peace-support” focus, something distinct from the country’s traditional “peace-keeping” role.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, this growth in awareness was accompanied by only a slight decrease in public support for the mission. Yet despite

---

<sup>57</sup> Armstrong, “O’Connor.”

<sup>58</sup> Canadian Press, “Canadians see Afghanistan as lost cause: poll,” (updated October 1, 2006), available at [www.ctv.ca](http://www.ctv.ca).

<sup>59</sup> CDFAI/Innovative, “Foreign Policy Under a Conservative Government,” (October 2006), 37.

<sup>60</sup> CBC, “Environics,” and Canadian Press, “59% want troops out of Afghanistan before 2009: poll,” *Globe and Mail*, (November 11, 2006), available at [globeandmail.com](http://globeandmail.com).

<sup>61</sup> Ekos, “70% of Canadians Support Troops in Afghanistan: Most Understand New Fighting Role,” February 2006.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

these professions of awareness and acceptance of the new role, as casualties mounted, Ekos tracked a decline in the approval of “peace-support” operations from 76% in September 2005, to 58% in October 2006.<sup>62</sup> By November 2006, CBC/Enviroics recorded that fully 80% of Canadians felt the country should focus on peace-building, instead of much riskier combat operations.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, in a series of public debates in 2006, the Dutch government warned its citizenry of the dangers faced by their military’s involvement.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, even with this openness—as well as an exhaustive parliamentary discussion—there has been little halt to the slide of national support for the deployment. Media relations and public diplomacy have mattered little; it is casualties that have dominated all other concerns.

### **The Afghanistan Mission: A Moral Imperial Project**

International terrorism does not pose an existential threat to Canada’s core productive base, nor does the Afghan mission contribute significantly to Canada’s security or wealth interests. In fact, the costs associated with this exercise, measured in blood and treasure, have largely outweighed the tangible benefits of eliminating al-Qaeda’s safe haven and bringing a measure of prosperous stability to the region.<sup>65</sup> This imperial project is therefore primarily sustained by the public’s willingness and desire to achieve moral ‘good’ in the world. To this end, rebuilding the Afghan state in the Western image, combined with vastly increased aid flows,<sup>66</sup> has indeed brought real fruits

---

<sup>62</sup> Ekos, “Update on Afghanistan,” November 6, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> CBC, “CBC-Enviroics public issues poll,” (November, 2006), available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/afghanistan-survey2006.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Molly Moore and John Ward Anderson, “NATO Faces Growing Hurdle As Call for Troops Falls Short,” *Washington Post*, (September 18, 2006), A10.

<sup>65</sup> For example, total Canadian deaths in Afghanistan now more than triple the loss of Canadian life on September 11, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> More than money has improved the quality of life in Afghanistan. Allowing females to attend school is very much an institutional reform, and depends upon more than cash alone.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

of progress to many Afghans—particularly women and girls. World Bank figures point to many dramatic improvements from the post-Taliban era.<sup>67</sup> Health expenditures have grown from \$4 USD per capita to \$11, with total health spending doubling from 3% to 6% of GDP. As of November 2006, health facility visits jumped from 3 million to 3.5 million in the four months preceeding, while 140 community midwives graduated from the June of that year. Meanwhile, in 2006, the number of community health workers jumped by over 1,500, to a total of more than 12,300.<sup>68</sup> Coverage rates of child immunization against diphtheria and measles have roughly doubled between 2000 and 2005. Meanwhile, the prevalence of child malnutrition fell from a 49% peak in 1997, to 39% in 2004, and the refugee population has fallen from 3.6 million in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2004.

Education statistics have demonstrated similar improvement. A female teacher pool is being trained, and since 2001, 37% of girls between the ages of 7 and 12 have attended school for the first time.<sup>69</sup> The number of pupils enrolled in primary education has risen almost six-fold, from 749,360 in 2000 to 4.4 million in 2004, with total primary enrollment rising from a low of 19% of age-relevant children in 2000, to 93% in 2004.

Similarly impressive is the country's economic performance. Foreign aid has grown from \$141 million USD in 2000, to \$2.2 billion in 2004, while Afghanistan's 2006 economic growth rate was an estimated 9%--leaving the economy roughly 3.5 times the size it was in 2001.<sup>70</sup> Infrastructure improvements have seen over 1,500km of roads

---

<sup>67</sup> The following figures, unless otherwise cited, are from World Bank, *World Development Indicators Online*, available at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org), accessed March 4, 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Afghanistan National Development Strategy Office, *Sector Summary Report*, (November, 2006), <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/jcmb/index.asp?j1=collapse&j2=collapse&j3=expand>, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Afghanistan Strategy Office, *Summary*, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Monitoring Board, *Report*, 1.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

paved, while 10% of the urban population and 5% of the rural now have electricity, and more than 400 postal centres have been rehabilitated.<sup>71</sup> Fertilizer consumption has quadrupled, and telephone use has increased 2,300%; there are now some 600,000 mobile subscribers. In terms of commerce, merchandise trade has arrested its Taliban decline and grown from \$185 million USD (exports) and \$550 million (imports) in 2000 to \$560 million and \$3.2 billion in 2005. More recently, tax revenue has grown from \$5.5 million Afghanis (AFA) in 2003 to \$9.7 million AFA in 2004, while the time required to start a business has fallen from 90 to 7 days over than same time period. Additionally, over 70% of Microfinance and Investment and Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) funds have been provided to women,<sup>72</sup> dramatically improving the economic opportunities available to the female population.

In sum, while tremendous security, reconstruction, and narcotics issues remain,<sup>73</sup> there has been considerable progress towards the creation of a viable and prosperous Afghan state. These development metrics suggest that rebuilding the Afghan state has brought considerable improvement to Afghanistan's basic quality of life. These achievements have great voter resonance, and therefore it is unsurprising to see the military and government appeal to these humanitarian considerations when lobbying for public support of the mission.

---

<sup>71</sup> Afghanistan Strategy Office, *Summary*, 4-5.

<sup>72</sup> Afghanistan Strategy Office, *Summary*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> For sober assessments of the current challenges, see International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's Endangered Compact," (Asia Briefing No. 59, 29 January, 2007), 8-10, and Gordon Smith, "Canada in Afghanistan: Is it Working?," *Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute*, (March 1, 2007). More specifically, disruptions abound in the insurgent-plagued south. Some 300 schools have been closed because of the renewed violence (about 35% of the total) (Monitoring Board, *Report*, 5.), and vengeful rebels have burned down a further 150. (Afghanistan Strategy Office, *Summary*, 6.) Narcotic problems also abound. Poppy cultivation rose a dramatic 59% in 2006 and "shows no sign of decreasing," as "law enforcement agencies do more to facilitate [drug trafficking] than to prevent it." Drug demand "is growing, not decreasing." (Afghanistan Strategy Office, *Summary*, 14.) Furthermore, critics, both within Afghanistan and abroad, also complain that economic growth is too slow to meet a growing population, that corruption is rampant, and that the government is permeated with characters of indecorous background.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Fundamentally, Canada's Afghan deployment is about constructing a state capable of providing security and sustaining prosperity for the Afghan people, something toward which considerable progress has already been achieved. It is therefore a humanitarian or moral project, sustained by the public's humanitarian ideals, and worthy of admiration. However, such an exercise is inherently unsustainable in the face of heavy costs—particularly casualties. Troop losses quickly outweigh benevolence towards other actors in the international system. While moral imperatives may be laudable, in a selfish, anarchical world, they are inherently weaker motivations than those of tangible self-interest.

### **Which Road to the Future?**

These political realities ensure that the length of Canada's mission can be estimated with some degree of certainty. Since the terrorist threat posed by Afghanistan's descent into failed state status is by no means existential, government policy can be assessed in light of wealth, relative international power, and domestic political support interests. As previously demonstrated, the scale of Canada's mission is small enough to be considered trivial in the context of national wealth as a whole. While the mission is unlikely to improve Canada's productivity or enhance external trade, the relatively small economic cost involved ensures that economic considerations will not hinder a continuation of Canada's overseas deployment.

In terms of relative international power, the analysis takes a more ambiguous turn. The elimination of terrorist operatives and al-Qaeda's strategic headquarters undoubtedly contributes to Canada's security. However, there exists little empirical evidence to

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

support of the longer-run plan to eliminate the roots of international terrorism by the dissemination of democracy and prosperity. Moreover, even if such a strategy offered great promise, progress towards these aims—particularly in Afghanistan’s southern regions—has been stymied.

Of even greater importance is the rise of a homegrown radical Islamic terrorist threat—inspired, in part, by Western military operations in the Middle East—suggesting that security officials must return their focus to the domestic arena. As for international diplomatic relations, anything other than upholding Canada’s 2009 commitment would significantly sour relations with its British, Dutch, and American allies. Yet recent refusals by other NATO members to undertake more dangerous missions have not been met with a total poisoning of the cooperation and dialogue within NATO, and as such, abandonment of the more dangerous aspects of the Afghan project would ultimately affect Canada’s diplomatic ties only minimally. In sum, while international power considerations may slightly favour a continuing Canadian military presence in Afghanistan, the extent of this utility is far from certain.

With the first two concerns either non-factors or ambiguous, this paper concludes that the ultimate length of Canada’s deployment to Afghanistan will depend upon domestic politics. Given that public support for non-existential wars is inversely related to the number of casualties incurred, the key variable in estimating the length of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan is the number of body bags flown home to CFB Trenton.<sup>74</sup>

Should the rate of casualties sustained in 2006 endure, it is inconceivable that Canada

---

<sup>74</sup> It is important to recognize that, as noted earlier, the Canadian public does not view terrorism as an existential threat. Consequently, little political capital exists for aggressive imperial wars. Athenians eagerly voted themselves into a bloody war with Syracuse because the public felt the existence of their state was at stake. Yet with Vietnam, the American public agonized over casualty rates because the war was seen as superfluous to the ultimate survival of the United States.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

would stay beyond 2009. The precipitous drop in public support accompanying such losses would make this impossible. In this scenario, it is even plausible that Canada would withdraw before the end of its mandate. A change in government would amplify this probability, as the new administration would not be beholden to the Conservative's extension of the mission to 2009.

Should casualties decline to their original, low rate, and were reconstruction to proceed rapidly, Canada will likely remain deployed in the region past 2009. With low casualties, the Canadian government could then rebuild public support for the mission by trumpeting the moral value of assisting Afghan women and children through the construction of a modern state. Development progress, as measured by the above-mentioned quality of life indicators and a diminishment of the southern insurgency, would do much to reassure Canadians that the mission's humanitarian objectives were being achieved. An effective, moral foreign policy—pursued in the absence of casualties—brings public support, and subsequently, votes to those leaders who adopt such a strategy.

A final scenario exists: an attack of the magnitude of 9/11, planned and prepared by elements hiding along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, and carried out on Canadian soil.<sup>75</sup> This would likely create circumstances similar to those in the United States following the collapse of the World Trade Centre towers. The attack would generate existential fears within government and among the public, and therefore ensure that sufficient political capital existed for the Afghanistan mission to continue, if not be

---

<sup>75</sup> A mass-casualty attack has already been threatened in response to Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. Bell," warns." Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, has even referred to Canadian troops in Kandahar as "Crusaders," a statement disturbingly similar to earlier accusations leveled by bin Laden towards the United States. See, for example, Karen J. Greenberg, Ed., *Al Qaeda Now*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

expanded. Even if such fears were an inaccurate reflection of the actual existential danger international terrorism poses, the uncertainties of international anarchy, combined with the predominance of state survival concerns, would ensure a strong military reaction—with little regard to the casualties and costs involved. The intensity of these actions would only diminish as the existential fears subsided.

### **Conclusion**

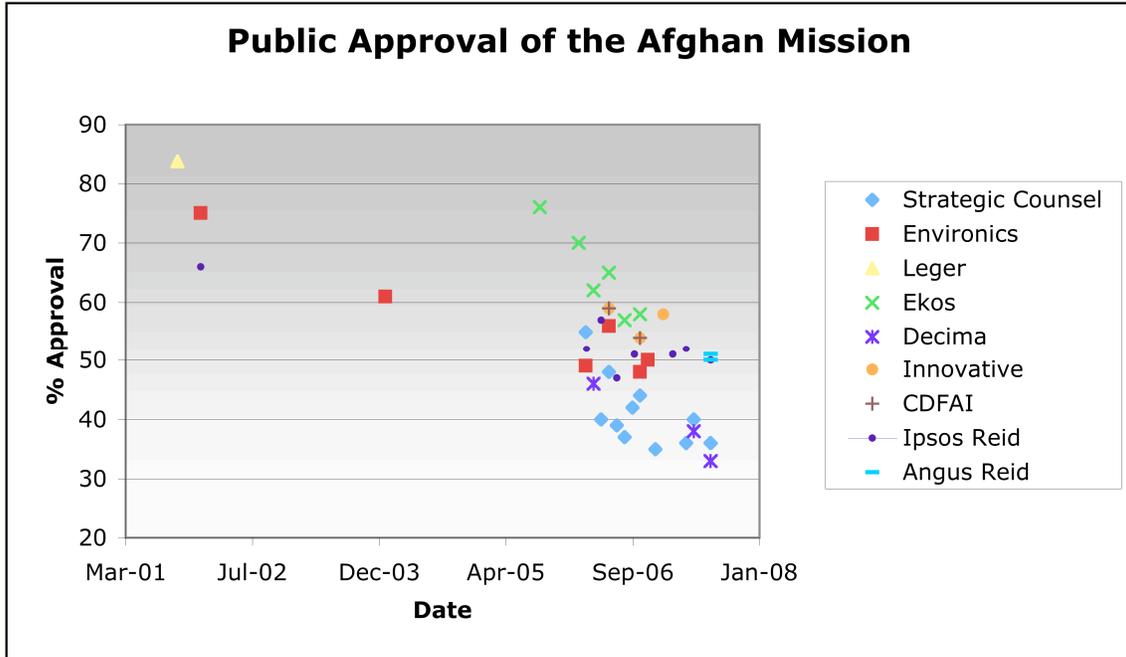
Canadian forces entered Afghanistan out of security necessity. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda demonstrated itself to be a clear and present danger, and therefore it is unsurprising that the Canadian government committed troops to assist in the disruption of that terrorist organization, as well as its Taliban protectors. However, recent developments have made it clear that the rebuilding of Afghanistan in the Western image at best only marginally improves Canada's security situation. More importantly, international terrorism is neither an existential threat, nor likely to overshadow homegrown terrorist operations. As such, the security impetus for Canada's involvement in Afghanistan no longer exists. The mission is therefore is a *moral* project, sustained by humanitarian concerns, and thus subject to the intense, casualty-contingent, cost-benefit calculations of domestic politics.

In this light, the paradox of moral imperialism is clear. In order for Canada to help construct Afghanistan in the institutional image that the government desires, it will be necessary to forcefully oppose those forces who utterly reject the democratic property rights model, and to do so until the nascent Kabul government is fully capable of performing such tasks itself. Unfortunately, in an age of diffused technology and dogged, well-organized adversaries, it is inevitable that such combat operations will result in

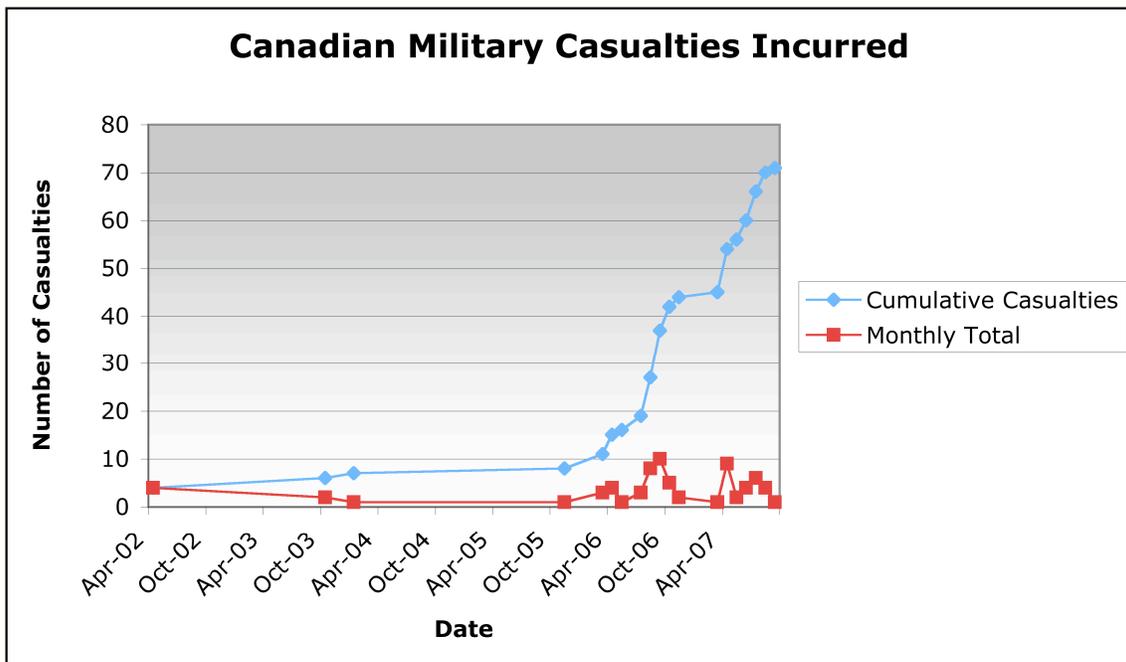
### *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

Canadian casualties. However, because moral imperialism is not sustained by the iron impetus of security and wealth interests, but instead by the relatively weak, domestic desire to perform ‘moral’ good, it is imperative that these operations avoid Canadian casualties. The public consistently assigns greater weight to casualty considerations than humanitarian concerns. For Canada, Afghanistan is a tangential security and overseas development issue, and thus the public is unwilling to sustain high costs, particularly when measured in soldiers’ lives. Those convinced of the moral merits of Canada’s mission to Afghanistan—and this includes the government and military themselves—would be therefore wise to encourage whatever force protection steps necessary to minimize the number of further Canadians killed.

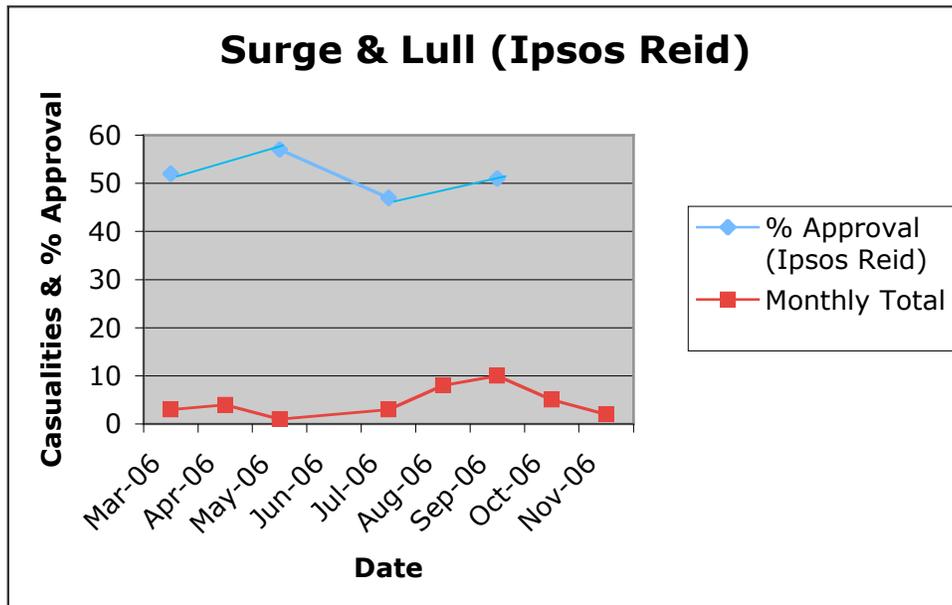
**Appendix A – Casualties and Public Approval**



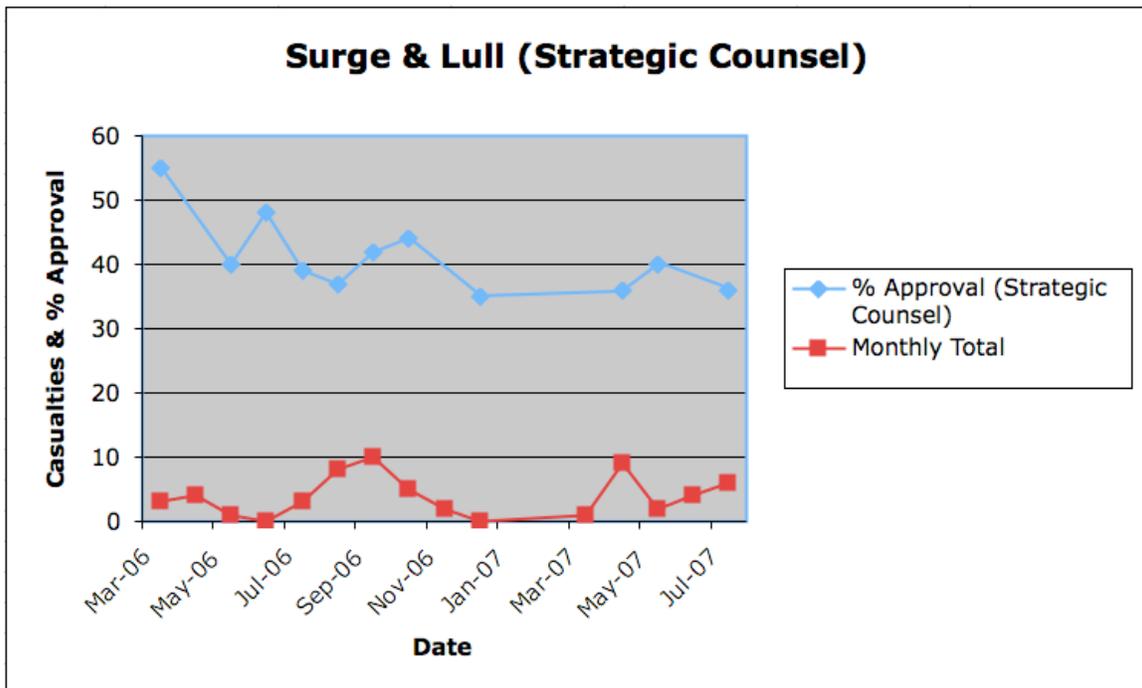
While each pollster finds a different level of public support, there is agreement with both the overall trajectory of approval decline and the responsiveness of the mission’s popularity to surges and lulls in the Canadian casualty rate.



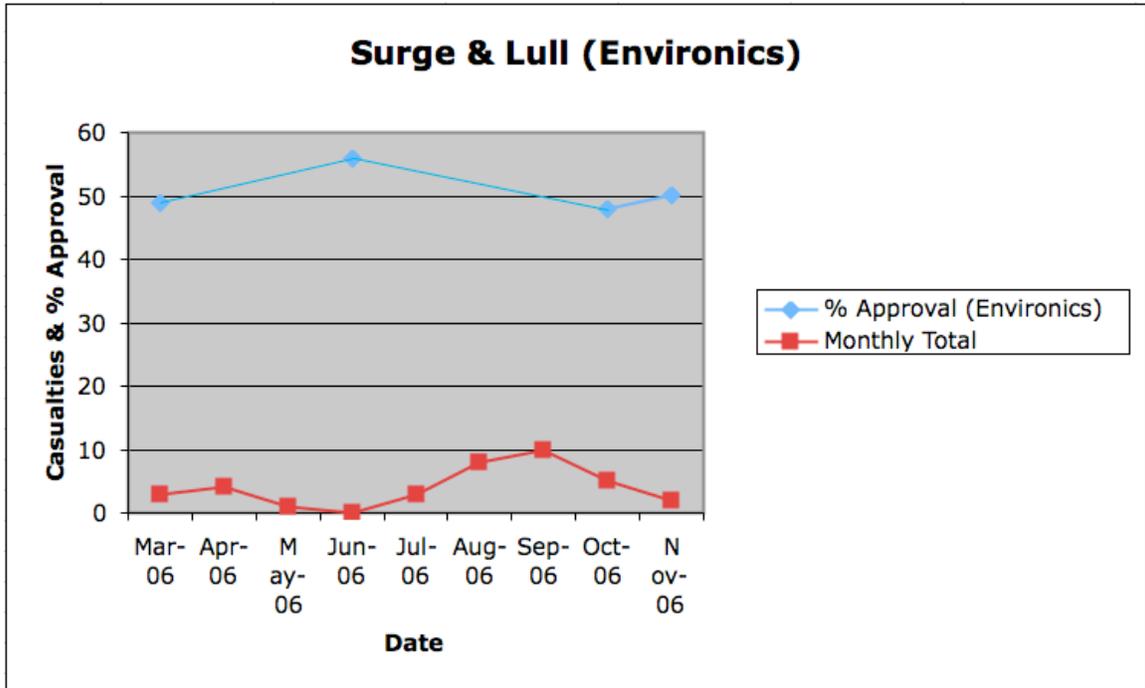
These approval declines roughly mirror the sharp spikes in monthly casualty rates.



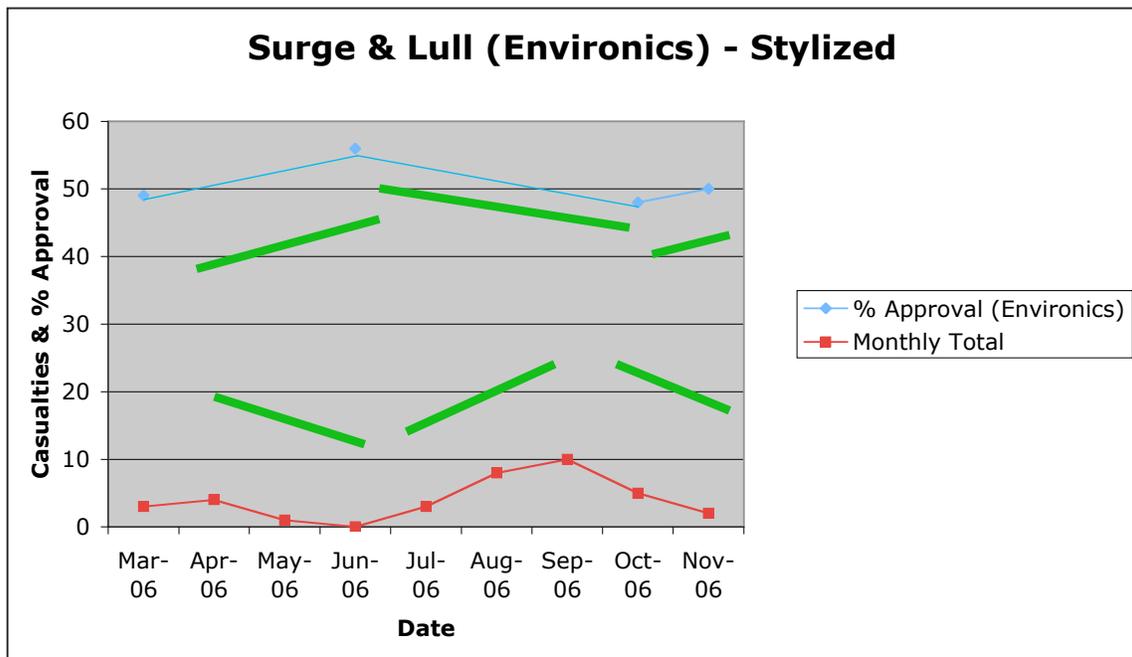
By examining the polling data, we see that ebbs and flows of public support are strongly related to these monthly casualty totals. When casualties go up, support goes down.



Again, we see an inverse relationship between Canadian casualties and popularity for Canada's mission.



Environics data demonstrates a similar theme: when an increasing number of Canadian soldiers are killed in the line of duty, public approval of the mission declines. When casualty rates decline, however, public approval rebounds slightly—keeping in mind that over the last six years, opinion recovery has not kept pace with overall approval decline.



Finally, this stylized model demonstrates the inverse relationship between casualties and public approval in more obvious detail.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

### **Bibliography**

- 9/11 Commission. *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Afghanistan National Development Strategy Office. *Sector Summary Report*. November, 2006.
- Anonymous [Michael Scheuer]. *Imperial Hubris*. Washington: Brassey's, 2004.
- Armstrong, Jane. "O'Connor on blitz to sell Afghan mission." *Globe and Mail*. November 15, 2006.
- Atran, Scott. "Mishandling Suicide Terrorism." *The Washington Quarterly*. Summer, 2004.
- Barber, Benjamin. *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy*. New York: Norton, 2003.
- BBC. "7 July Bombings." Accessed November 23, 2006.
- Bell, Stewart. "Al-Qaeda warns Canada." *National Post*. October 28, 2006.
- Blatchford, Christie. "How Pte. Costall died." *Globe and Mail*. March 30, 2006.
- Brinkley, Douglas. "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine." In Eugene R. Wittkopf and Christopher M. Jones. Eds. *The Future of American Foreign Policy*. New York: Worth Publishers, 1999. 49-45.
- Byman, Daniel. "Measuring the War on Terrorism." *Current History*. December, 2003.
- Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute/Innovative Research Group. "Canadians more concerned about home grown terrorists than foreign terrorists." August, 2006. Available at [www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org).
- Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute/Innovative Research Group. "Foreign Policy Under a Conservative Government." October 2006.
- Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute/Innovative Research Group. "CDFAI Media Poll." June 2006. Available at [www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org).
- Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute/Innovative Research Group. "The World in Canada: Demographics and Diversity in Canadian Foreign Policy." October 31, 2005.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

- Canadian Press. "59% want troops out of Afghanistan before 2009: poll." *Globe and Mail*. November 11, 2006.
- Canadian Press. "Canadians see Afghanistan as lost cause: poll." Updated October 1, 2006. Available at [www.ctv.ca](http://www.ctv.ca).
- Carothers, Thomas. "Democracy: Terrorism's Uncertain Antidote." *Current History*. December, 2003.
- CBC. "Canadian casualties around Kandahar." Accessed November 20, 2006.
- CBC. "Afghanistan, by the numbers." November 9, 2006.
- CBC. "CBC-Enviro-nics public issues poll." November, 2006.
- CBC. "Military considers longer tours of duty in Afghanistan." October 22, 2006.
- CBC. "Canadian army needs reservists to fill gaps: commander." November 21, 2006.
- Central Intelligence Agency. *CIA World Factbook*. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>.
- Collier, Paul. "The Market For Civil War." *Foreign Policy*. May/June, 2003.
- Colombo, John. Ed. *Canadian World Almanac: 1988*. Toronto: Global Press, 1987.
- Copeland, Dale. *Origins of Major War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. *Canada's International Policy Statement*. 2005.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. "Afghanistan and Canada's International Policy." November 3, 2006.
- Department of National Defence /Canadian Forces Backgrounder. "Canadian Forces Operations in Afghanistan." Available at [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=1703#athena](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703#athena). Accessed March 10, 2007.
- Department of National Defence /Canadian Forces Backgrounder. The Canadian Forces' Contribution to the International Campaign Against Terrorism. Available at [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Newsroom/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=490](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=490). Accessed March 10, 2007.
- Department of National Defence. *Canada's International Policy Statement: Defence*. 2005.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

- Der Spiegel*. "Afghanistan Testing NATO Alliance." November 17, 2006.
- DeYoung, Karen. "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Hurting U.S. Terror Fight." *Washington Post*. September 24, 2006.
- Ekos Research Associates. "Update on Afghanistan." November 6, 2006.
- Ekos Research Associates. "Attitudes towards the Canadian Forces' Participation in Afghanistan." May 12, 2006.
- Ekos Research Associates. "70% of Canadians Support Troops in Afghanistan: Most Understand New Fighting Role." February 2006.
- Fair, C. Christine, and Husain Haqqani. "Think Again: Islamist Terrorism." *Foreign Policy*. January, 2006.
- Fair, C. Christine, and Bryan Sheppard. "Who Supports Terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. 29:51, 2006.
- Ferguson, Niall. *Colossus*. London: Penguin, 2004.
- Ferguson, Niall. *The Cash Nexus*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Gall, Carlotta. "Attacks in Afghanistan Grow More Frequent and Lethal." *New York Times*. September 27, 2006.
- Gall, Carlotta. "Resistance Surges in the South." Graphic accompanying "After Afghan Battle, a Harder Fight for Peace." *New York Times*. October 3, 2006. Available at [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com).
- Grammaticas, Damian. "On the front line in Afghanistan." *BBC News*. September 16, 2006.
- Grieco, Joseph. *Cooperation Among Nations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Globe and Mail*. "Layton suggests talks with Taliban." September 1, 2006.
- Globe and Mail*. "Canada will spend more than \$3.5-billion by 2009." June 7, 2006.
- Greenberg, Karen J. Ed. *Al Qaeda Now*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Grossman, Gene, and Elhanan Helpman. "Protection for Sale." *American Economic Review*. September, 1994.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

- Hyde, Major Charles K. "Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers." *Aerospace Power Journal*. Summer 2000.
- International Crisis Group. "Afghanistan's Endangered Compact." Asia Briefing No.59. 29 January, 2007.
- Ipsos Reid. "Canadians React In Wake of Terror-Plot Arrests." June 10, 2006. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).
- Ipsos Reid. "Life Normal After Terrorism." September 2002. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).
- Ipsos Reid. "Health Care (36%) Increases 14 Points to Return as Most Important Issue Facing the Country According to Canadians." November 22, 2001. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).
- Ipsos Reid. "The Financial Health of Airlines (66%) Are a Bigger Concern to Canadians than the Threat of Terrorism on Flights." November 18, 2001.
- Ipsos Reid. "Stress Take Its Toll." October 21, 2001. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).
- Ipsos Reid. "While Majority (73%) Agree that Canada Should Join the United States and Also Declare War on International Terrorism it is Conditional as Support Falls to Just Over Half (54%) if War Exposes Canadian Civilians to Attack by Terrorists" September 21, 2001. Available at [www.ipsos-na.com](http://www.ipsos-na.com).
- Johnson, R. Barry, and Oana M. Nedelescu. "The Impact of Terrorism on Financial Markets." IMF Working Paper. WP/05/06.
- Joint Coordinating and Monitoring Board. *Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact: Bi-Annual JCMB Report*. November, 2006.
- Krasner, Stephen. "State Power and the Structure of International Trade." *World Politics*. April, 1976.
- Laxer, James. "Why Canada should get out of Afghanistan." *Globe and Mail*. November 3, 2006.
- Luterbacher, Urs, and Carla Norrlof. "Production, Protection, and International Relations." Paper presented at ECPR Conference, Canterbury.
- Margolis, Eric. "Afghan War isn't Ours: Canada has absolutely no strategic interests in Afghanistan." *Toronto Sun*. March 12, 2006.
- McNeil, William H. *The Pursuit of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

## *Afghanistan and the Paradox of Moral Imperialism*

- Moore, Molly, and John Ward Anderson,. "NATO Faces Growing Hurdle As Call for Troops Falls Short." *Washington Post*. September 18, 2006. A10.
- Mueller, John. "The Iraq Syndrome." *Foreign Affairs*. November/December, 2005.
- Mueller, John. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. New York: Wiley, 1972.
- O'Hanlon, Michael, and Nina Kamp. *Iraq Index*. Brookings Institution. November 30, 2006.
- Privy Council Office. *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*. April 2004.
- Reiter, Dan and Allan Stam. *Democracies at War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005." May 11, 2006. HC 1087.
- Reuters. "Olympics could hurt Canada's Afghan military tour." November 20, 2006.
- Schmidt, Ted. "Harper's worthy Afghan mission." *Toronto Star*. March 14, 2006.
- Smith, Gordon. "Canada in Afghanistan: Is it Working?" *Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute*. March 1, 2007.
- Simpson, Jeffrey. "Do you realize we're at war." *Globe and Mail*. May 20, 2006. A19.
- Sloan, Elinor. *Dispatches*. March-April, 2006.
- Snyder, Jack. *Myths of Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Taylor, Scott. "Canada's Mission in Afghanistan: Beyond the Rhetoric." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*. Fall 2006.
- The Economist*. "NATO takes the field." September 5, 2006.
- World Bank. *World Development Indicators Online*. Available at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).
- World Public Opinion.org. "Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched by Expanded Military Role in Afghanistan. May 26, 2006. Available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/198.php?nid=&id=&pnt=198&lb=brusc>.