

**Making Sense of Afghanistan:  
The Domestic Politics of International Stabilization Missions in Australia and Canada**

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Between the end of the Cold War and the first years of the post-9/11 era, international stabilization missions were widely seen as an appropriate response to the widespread intrastate violence that was a mark of the immediate post-Cold War era. Stabilization missions were deployed across the world: UNITAF (Unified Task Force–Somalia, 1992-93); SFOR (Stabilization Force Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1996-2004); UNAMSIL (UN Mission in Sierra Leone, 1999-2005); KFOR (Kosovo Force, 1999-present); ISAF (International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan, 2001-present); RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003-present); UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia, 2003-present); MINUSTAH (Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti, 2004-present); and ISF (International Stabilization Force Timor-Leste, 2006-present).

Stabilization forces are usually multilateral, organized under the authority of an international organization such as the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. However, unlike traditional peacekeeping missions of the Cold War era, in which lightly-armed forces were interposed between belligerents who had already agreed to a ceasefire, stabilization forces tend to be heavily armed and inserted into an on-going conflict, where there is no peace to keep.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, stabilization forces have much more ambitious goals than just peace-making. Stabilization involves “imposing or supporting with armed forces the establishment of order in states or regions.”<sup>2</sup> Roland Paris has suggested that the creation of “order” in such a way involves nothing less than the creation of a Hobbesian Leviathan—in other words, trying to remake much of the economic, political, legal, and even the cultural fabric of the community.<sup>3</sup> This requires the “merging” of very different tasks,<sup>4</sup> and the deployment of resources from a variety of government departments – the so-called “whole of government” or “joined-up” or “3-D” approaches that seek to link defence, development and diplomatic efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Given such hugely ambitious goals, it is hardly surprising that most of the stabilization missions created in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras were not able to achieve their objectives. Even when the political environment is relatively consensual, attempts by outsiders to establish a political and economic order in a community are deeply problematic, partly because the tools brought to bear are inappropriate,<sup>6</sup> partly because

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Boulden, *Peace Enforcement: The United Nations Experience in Congo, Somalia and Bosnia* (London: Praeger, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Douglas L. Bland and Sean M. Maloney, *Campaigns for International Security: Canada's Defence Policy at the Turn of the Century* (Montréal and Kingston: Mc-Gill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merger of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series (Paris: OECD, 2006); Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, *Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts? Assessing "Whole of Government" Approaches to Fragile States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2007); Cedric de Coning, “Civil-Military Coordination Practices and Approaches within United Nations Peace Operations,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10:1 (Fall 2007), 1–35; Heather Hrychuk, “Combating the Security Development Nexus?” *International Journal* 64:3 (Summer 2009), 825–42.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Bronson, “When Soldiers Become Cops,” *Foreign Affairs* 81:6 (November/December 2002), 122–32.

the resources devoted to the mission are invariably too limited to make a significant difference, and partly because the state-building task is so vast that, as Michael Wesley reminds us, stabilization missions “are trapped by the realization that if they withdraw, unreconciled hatreds in the political sphere, unresolved resentments in the economic sphere, and unreformed traditions in the social sphere will tear apart the imposed order and state frameworks.”<sup>7</sup>

But when there is local resistance to the attempts of outsiders to “remake” the community, or when an open insurgency develops, a stabilization mission becomes deeply fraught, requiring the use of force or the embrace of counter-insurgency (COIN) measures to create order.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as Jan Angstrom notes, the “invited Leviathan” itself often can create incentives for belligerents within the state to continue the war.<sup>9</sup> In such circumstances, what might have started as a 3-D mission tends to become “one big ‘D,’” as Canada’s former foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy, so aptly put it in 2006.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the focus of the emerging literature on international stabilization tends to focus on the impact of these missions on the political and economic conditions of the community where the stabilization missions are deployed.<sup>11</sup> This has been especially true of policy assessments of the Afghanistan mission.<sup>12</sup> And yet stabilization missions are not only deeply political for the country where they are deployed, but also for any country participating in the mission. We need to look at the other side of the coin: what effects such missions have had on the politics of the countries that participate in these missions.

In stabilization missions, unlike first generation peacekeeping operations, members of the armed forces are put in harm’s way, and are thus inherently more dangerous, particularly when the stabilization mission generates an insurgency. Such missions also cost a great deal, as armed forces that are sent into a stabilization mission under-equipped invariably move to procure the often expensive equipment necessary to afford troops maximal protection. Moreover, unlike most first-generation peacekeeping operations conducted under the aegis of the United Nations, the costs of stabilization missions are not reimbursed by the international community. Finally, and most importantly, stabilization missions are, by their nature, open-ended. Unlike

<sup>7</sup> Michael Wesley, “The State of the Art on the Art of State Building,” *Global Governance* 14:3 (July-September 2008), 379–80.

<sup>8</sup> John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Edward Luttwak, “Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice,” *Harper’s Magazine* (February 2007), 33–42; Frank G. Hoffman, “Neo-classical Counterinsurgency?” *Parameters* 37:2 (Summer 2007), 71–82; Harald Håvoll, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency* (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 2008); Joshua D. Kertzer, “ISAF in Afghanistan, Or Learning to Love Counter-Insurgency,” *Policy Options* 29:8 (September 2008), 14–20.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Angstrom, “Inviting the Leviathan: External Forces, War, and State-building in Afghanistan,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19:3 (September 2008), 374–96.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ernie Regehr, “Afghanistan: From Good Intentions to Sustainable Solutions,” *Project Ploughshares Briefing* 06/5 (August 2006), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Paris, “NATO’s Choice in Afghanistan: Go Big or Go Home,” *Policy Options* 28:1 (December 2006/January 2007), 35–43; Barnett R. Rubin, “Peace Building and State-building in Afghanistan: Constructing Sovereignty for Whose Security?” *Third World Quarterly* 27:1 (February 2006), 175–85; Col. M.D. (Mike) Capstick, “The Civil-Military Effort in Afghanistan: A Strategic Perspective,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10:1 (Fall 2007), 1–27.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan: Is It Working?* (Calgary: Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007); Canada, Parliament, Senate, Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, *How Are We Doing in Afghanistan? Canadians Need to Know*, 39th Parl., 2nd sess., Ottawa, June 2008; available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/defe-e/rep-e/rep09jun08-e.pdf>.

some military operations, such as an invasion that is intended to remove a regime from power, a stabilization mission has no clear metric for “success,” and thus no clear exit point. Moreover, because such missions, by definition, involve meddling in other people’s politics, they are always messy affairs, particularly so when the intervention from the outside is deeply resented and spawns an insurgency dedicated to killing as many “internationals” as possible.

Such conditions make it particularly difficult for governments to generate public support for stabilization missions. As Jon W. Western notes, such missions are not like military operations undertaken to defend the homeland against direct attacks or invasions.<sup>13</sup> In those cases, the threat to the community is so self-evident and unambiguous that public support for putting the armed forces in harm’s way and spending treasure on all means necessary to repel attackers can be assumed, if not entirely taken for granted.

In the case of expeditionary operations, by contrast, the relationship between the national interest and the success of the mission is not at all self-evident, and must be articulated in order to convince citizens of the need for the mission. The citizenry must be convinced of at least five interconnected elements:

- the general “rightness” of the mission – in other words, a conviction that it is right and proper for their country to be interfering in the politics of another community, even if the “interference” is technically “invited”;
- the “rightness” of the means selected – in other words, being convinced that the other partners participating in the mission are appropriate, that the exogenous “authorization” (if any) that is provided is appropriate, and that the operational means chosen are just in the circumstances;
- the “rightness” of putting members of the armed forces in harm’s way given the objectives sought;
- the “rightness” of spending large sums of money on supporting the mission rather than spending it elsewhere; and
- the likelihood that the mission will have or has had “positive” effects, either on conditions within the country to which the mission is deployed, or for the perceived “national interests” of their own country (or, ideally, both).

The complexity of this calculation means that the justificatory rhetoric used by governments becomes crucial for the generation – and maintenance – of public support. Absent justifications that make intuitive sense to citizens, support will simply not be forthcoming. As Western notes, “arguments must be plausible. An argument that flies in the face of the public’s experience or otherwise strains credulity is not likely to be given much weight—no matter how much the information is controlled or spun.”<sup>14</sup>

There is no better example of the importance of the impact of justificatory rhetoric than the case of the Australian and Canadian participation in the stabilization mission in Afghanistan. Australians and Canadians have almost identical views on the international mission in Afghanistan, now in its ninth year; the pattern of opinion in both countries shows a remarkably similar trajectory. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, there was considerable support in both countries for participating in an American-led invasion of Afghanistan, and the ouster of the Taliban regime, which had harboured the organizers of 9/11.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John W. Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, *Selling Intervention*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Christophe Boucher and Stéphane Roussel, “From Afghanistan to ‘Quebecistan’: Quebec as the Pharmakon of Canadian Foreign and Defence Policy,” in Jean Daudelin and Daniel Schwanen, eds. *Canada Among Nations 2008: What Room for Manoeuvre?* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), graph 7.1, 138; Stewart Firth, *Australia in International Politics: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 89–90; Henry S. Albinski, “Australia, the Terrorism Phenomenon, and the United States,” *AQ: Australian Quarterly*

Likewise, there was general support in both countries for the deployment of forces to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that was created by broad international agreement to assist the new government of Hamid Karzai, who had been installed by the international community to replace the Taliban (and later confirmed by a national election in 2004).

However, when the Australian and Canadian governments decided to respond to a growing insurgency in Afghanistan by reinserting combat troops – a Canadian battle group was deployed to Kandahar in January 2006, and an Australian Special Forces Task Group was re-deployed to Afghanistan by September of that year – this new mission did not enjoy the same level of support as there had been for military action in 2001-2002. On the contrary: as Table 1 shows, since 2006 Australians and Canadians have demonstrated almost exactly similar views on this mission.

**Table 1. Public Attitudes towards the Afghan Mission**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b><i>Positive</i></b>					
Australia	45	46	42	46	43
Canada	43	37	40	39	38
<b><i>Negative</i></b>					
Australia	48	46	56	51	54
Canada	45	57	57	53	58

SOURCE: Aggregated from polls asking about general support for the mission, e.g. “Should Australia continue to be involved militarily in Afghanistan?” and “Overall, do you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose the decision to send Canadian troops to Afghanistan?”<sup>16</sup>

As Table 1 suggests, public support for the mission in Australia and Canada after 2006 was tepid at best, rarely coming close to the 50 per cent mark, while opposition to the mission was much stronger. Attitudes in Australia – perhaps affected by the opposition to the country’s participation in the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 – were mainly negative at the outset: an AC Nielsen poll in March 2006 found 45 per cent were

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74:2 (March-April, 2002); Amin Saikal, “Afghanistan, Terrorism, and American and Australian Responses,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 56:1 (2002), 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Angus Reid Global Monitor*, Issue Watch: Afghanistan, available at <http://www.angus-reid.com/issue/C57/>; Allan Gyngell, *The Lowy Institute Poll 2007: Australia and the World—Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (2007), fig. 7, 10, and annual polls each year thereafter, all available at <http://www.loyyinstitute.org/>. It should be noted that the first two annual Lowy Polls in 2005 and 2006 did not have a question specifically on Afghanistan.

in favour of the Australian mission, with 48 per cent opposed.<sup>17</sup> In Canada, there had been solid support for the ISAF deployment in Kabul, seen by many Canadians as a “peacekeeping” mission. However, after the Canadian battle group was deployed to Kandahar in January 2006, and began to engage the Taliban in combat,<sup>18</sup> there was what Joseph F. Fletcher and his colleagues characterize as “a precipitous fall in public support for the mission.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, this pattern of divided opinion in both countries remained remarkably consistent over a five-year period.

What explains the pattern of opinion on the Afghanistan mission observed here? There are in fact two puzzles to be addressed. The first is why Australians and Canadians should exhibit almost identical views on this mission, over a considerable period of time, despite considerable differences between the two countries, not only their different geostrategic locations but also in the domestic political contexts in which the mission evolved in each country. The second puzzle is why in both countries the mission never generated more than tepid support, and indeed faced considerable opposition.

The purpose of this paper is to address these puzzles. I look at the evolution of the mission in both countries, and locate the answer to both puzzles in the same explanation. I suggest that we cannot understand the similarities in attitudes towards that mission by looking at differences in domestic politics or geostrategic location. Rather, I will argue that there was an important similarity at work in this case that provides a more compelling explanation for the tepidness of the support for the mission: the different justifications on offer from their governors simply did not convince either Australians or Canadians that the blood and treasure being devoted to the Afghanistan mission was worthwhile.

### **The Afghan Mission in Australia and Canada**

If, as John Blaxland has argued, Australia and Canada have historically been “strategic cousins” in world politics,<sup>20</sup> it is perhaps not overly surprising that the governments in Canberra and Ottawa should have responded in essentially similar ways to the attacks of 11 September 2001. Tied to the United States by bonds of alliance, economics and “kin-country” friendship,<sup>21</sup> both Australia and Canada deployed their armed forces to participate in the American-led multinational coalition that helped overthrow the Taliban government. Australia contributed 1000 troops, including ships, aircraft, and a 200-person Special Air Services Task Group that was deployed with American forces in the south and the east, participating in the operations around Tora Bora before being withdrawn in December 2002. Canada’s contribution to the overthrow of the Taliban included the deployment of naval vessels in the Persian Gulf region for force protection and fleet support;

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<sup>17</sup> AC Nielsen/*The Age* poll conducted in February 2006, reported by *Angus Reid Global Monitor*: [www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/11050](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/11050).

<sup>18</sup> Sean M. Maloney, “Blood on the Ground: Canada and the Southern Campaign in Afghanistan,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 23:4 (December 2007), 407–17.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph F. Fletcher, Heather Bastedo and Jennifer Hove, “Losing Heart: Declining Support and the Political Marketing of the Afghanistan Mission,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42:4 (December 2009), 916.

<sup>20</sup> John C. Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> While Huntington’s “civilizational” approach has been deservedly criticized, his “kin-country” thesis provides a far better explanation for certain relationships than other strands of international relations theory. See Kim Richard Nossal, “Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater? Huntington’s ‘Kin-Country’ Thesis and Australian-Canadian Relations,” in Linda Cardinal and David Headon, eds., *Shaping Nations: Constitutionalism and Society in Australia and Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2002), 167–81.

the assignment of 40 members of Canada's special forces, Joint Task Force Two (JTF2), deployed from December 2001 until June 2002, serving with American and New Zealand special forces; and the despatch of a 750-person battle group from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) to Kandahar, to fight alongside Americans from January to July 2002.

Following the ouster of the Taliban, the two "cousins" remained engaged in what became known simply as "the Afghanistan mission" – more accurately, contributing to the commitments made by the international community under various agreements negotiated at international conferences on Afghanistan that were held after 2001, including the original Bonn Agreement of 2001 and the Afghanistan Compact of 2006. These agreements were designed to help the Afghan government that was put in place in 2001-2002 to provide security and reconstruction for the country. However, in the period from 2002 to 2005, the involvement differed. While Canada took a leading role in ISAF, deploying 1900 personnel to the Kabul area, Australia deployed just a single officer to ISAF's mine-clearing operations, though it continued to deploy the Hercules, Orions and Boeing 707 air refuellers to the Afghanistan mission.<sup>22</sup> In 2005, with the emergence of a sustained insurgency in the southern provinces, both governments decided to deploy combat troops to the mission. Approximately 1500 Australian troops were eventually deployed to Oruzgan province and some 2800 Canadian troops took up positions in Kandahar province.

### **Differences between Australia and Canada**

However, while the governments in both Australia and Canada responded in essentially the same manner as Western alliance partners of the United States, there are a number of substantial differences that can be identified that might have had an impact on the evolution of public opinion in each country.

#### *Casualties and the "Dover Effect"*

First, the most obvious difference between the countries is that there has been a major difference in casualty rates. Although the two countries have roughly similar numbers of troops deployed per capita, by the end of June 2010, a total of 150 Canadian soldiers had lost their lives in Afghanistan; a total of 16 Australian soldiers had been killed. Given this difference, it might be expected that the differential rate of casualties would give rise to a difference in opinions about the war as a result of what Jean-Christophe Boucher has called the "Trenton effect" – the Canadian version of the "Dover effect."<sup>23</sup> However, as Boucher has demonstrated,

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<sup>22</sup> The difference in commitment during this period can be explained by the US-driven invasion of Iraq in 2002-2003. While the Howard Coalition government joined the invasion of Iraq, in Canada, the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien saw a significant troop commitment to Afghanistan as a means of compensating for its refusal to join the "coalition of the willing." See Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), chap. 4; Maryanne Kelton, "More Than an Ally?" *Contemporary US-Australian Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), chap. 6.

<sup>23</sup> The remains of American military personnel killed overseas are flown to the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs located at Dover Air Force Base (AFB) in Delaware. Since the Vietnam war, passing (or failing) "the Dover test" has been informal American parlance for whether the use of combat troops abroad will be (or is being) supported by the American public. For example, in a speech on 19 January 2000, Gen. Hugh Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, articulated the test this way, arguing that before a decision to commit combat forces overseas, policy-makers should ask themselves: "Is the American public prepared for the sight of our most precious resource coming home in flag-draped caskets into Dover Air Force Base?" See Kevin F. Gilmartin, "Shelton Outlines Role of Military in 21st Century," *American Forces Press Service News*, 21 January 2000; available at <http://www.defense.gov//News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=44503>). While the "Dover test" has a clear normative connotation, the "Dover effect," by contrast, is an empirical term. Usually attributed to Gen. Tommy Franks, commander-in-chief of US Central Command from 2000 to 2003, it refers to the decline in public support for a war that tends to come from seeing flag-draped coffins being unloaded at Dover AFB. Because of the negative impact on public

Canadian opinion in the aggregate has remain generally unaffected by the “Trenton effect.” To be sure, Boucher identifies regional effects: casualties had a clearer impact on negative views about the mission in Ontario and Québec than in Alberta, for example. However, given that casualties grew so dramatically after 2006,<sup>24</sup> we do not see any clear impact on opinion.

Until June 2010, the Australian casualty rate was, by contrast, very much slower, but as in Canada there is no evidence that the fatalities had an impact on Australian opinion: on the contrary, Australian opinion remains flat throughout this period. To be sure, while the deaths of five Australian soldiers within a two-week period in June 2010 had an immediate and sharply downward impact on support for the mission – fully 61 per cent of Australians thought that Australia should withdraw from Afghanistan, up from 54 per cent in March 2010 and 50 per cent in March 2009<sup>25</sup> – it is too early to tell whether this will be an Australian version of the “Dover effect.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Differences in Geostrategic Location*

It might be expected that differences in geostrategic location might have given rise to differences in the way in which Australians and Canadians viewed their respective country’s participation in the Afghan mission. Although Canada was named by al-Qaeda as a Western target, and 24 Canadians were killed in the attacks of 9/11, Canada has not been attacked. To be sure, 18 members of a homegrown terror cell – dubbed the “Toronto 18” – were arrested in 2006 and charged with a range of terror-related crimes, including a plot to blow up the Toronto Stock Exchange, the Toronto headquarters of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and CFB Trenton and to invade the Parliament buildings and decapitate the prime minister. While 11 of the Toronto 18 eventually faced court, all of whom pleaded guilty or were found guilty, with a number sentenced to lengthy jail terms, this terrorist plot was somewhat unusual because a informer, who was paid \$300,000 by the police, encouraged the cell’s activities. But there has been no successful attack against Canada or Canadians (other than Canadians deployed or working in Afghanistan).

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opinion, American administrations have on occasion resorted to “Dover bans.” In 1991, for example, the United States Department of Defense banned media from photographing the coffins of American war dead being repatriated at Dover AFB; the ban was reimposed during the Iraq war in 2003. See Brian Gran, “The Dover Ban: Wartime Control over Images of Public and Private Deaths,” paper presented to “*Unblinking: New Perspectives on Visual Privacy in the 21st Century*,” University of California Berkeley, 3-4 November 2006; available at <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/institutes/bclt/events/unblinking/unblinking/Gran.pdf>. Canadian Forces Base Trenton is where the remains of all Canadian Forces personnel who die overseas are taken. See Jean-Christophe Boucher, “Evaluating the ‘Trenton Effect’: Canadian Public Opinion and Military Casualties in Afghanistan (2006-2009),” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40:2 (June 2010): 237–58; also Kim Richard Nossal, “The Unavoidable Shadow of Past Wars: Obsequies for Casualties of the Afghanistan Mission in Australia and Canada,” *Australasian Canadian Studies* 26:1 (2008), 91–124.

<sup>24</sup> Between 2001 and the deployment to Kandahar in 2006, eight Canadians had been killed, four of whom had been killed in a “friendly fire” incident when they were bombed by an American jet fighter; between March 2006 and June 2010, 142 Canadians died in Afghanistan: 36 in 2006, 30 in 2007, 32 in 2008, 32 in 2009, and 12 in the first six months of 2010.

<sup>25</sup> The poll was conducted the week after Sapper Jacob Moerland and Sapper Darren Smith were killed by an improvised explosive device on 7 June 2010; the results were announced the same day as three Australian commandos lost their lives in a helicopter crash. Essential Media Communications, “Troops in Afghanistan,” *Essential Report*, 21 June 2010. Available at <http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/troops-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>26</sup> Unlike Britain, Canada, and the United States, Australia does not use a single base for repatriating Australian Defence Force members who die on service overseas: remains are flown to the Royal Australian Air Force base or commercial airport closest to the home town of the fallen ADF member.

By contrast, numerous Islamist attacks have been directed against Australians and Australian government installations. In late 2001, a planned bombing of the Australian high commission in Singapore was thwarted by security forces. Most importantly, the successful bombings of nightclubs in Bali in October 2002, which killed over 200 people, including 88 Australians, demonstrated the degree to which Australians were specifically targeted. The suicide bombings of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August 2003, in which Australia was specifically mentioned, the suicide bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta in September 2004, and the double bombing of the Ritz-Carlton and Marriot hotels in Jakarta in July 2009 all confirmed the degree to which Australia and Australians were specifically the targets of Islamist terrorists, notably Jemaah Islamiyah. In addition, there have been a number of domestic Islamist threats, including the Sydney Five in 2005 and the Benbrika group in Melbourne in 2008.

While Australians have been targeted and attacked in a way that Canadians have not, this difference does not appear to have been reflected in opinions about the mission in Afghanistan. Australians appear to be no more keen on the Afghanistan mission than Canadians, despite their more obvious targeting by Islamist forces.

*Bipartisanship: Real and Faux*

A third set of differences lie in the bipartisan support for operations in Afghanistan. In Australia, both sides of politics have been unambiguous in their support for the mission since its beginnings. When the Howard government recommitted a major force to Afghanistan in 2006, and increased their numbers in 2007, strong approval was voiced by the Australian Labor Party under both Kim Beazley, who was ALP leader from January 2005 to December 2006, when he was replaced by Kevin Rudd. After the ALP came to power in the November 2007 elections, Rudd continued Howard's approach. And when Rudd himself was forced to resign as ALP leader in June 2010, the new prime minister, Julia Gillard, articulated the continuity explicitly, assuring President Barack Obama when he called to congratulate her that "my approach to Afghanistan will continue the approach taken to date by the Australian government."<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, when it was in opposition after 2007, the Coalition under Brendan Nelson (2007-2008), Malcolm Turnbull (2008-2009) and Tony Abbott (December 2009-present) offered the same level of support for the mission as the ALP. The minor parties in the Senate were not a significant factor: the Australian Greens were opposed to the mission, calling for an immediate withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> Steve Fielding, the lone Family First member, favoured the mission, as did Nick Xenophon, the sole independent.

As a consequence of this array of elite sentiment, Afghanistan was essentially off the agenda as a political or partisan issue. The 2007 election campaign, for example, was marked by the absence of the deployment in Afghanistan as an issue. According to the Australian Election Study, the most important non-economic issues in the campaign were health and the environment, with the war in Iraq, where Australians were also deployed, and terrorism barely mentioned.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, by 2007, there was almost no difference in the minds of voters between the two main parties on terrorism policies.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the election campaign was marked by a high

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<sup>27</sup> "Australia's Gillard assures US over Afghan war backing," BBC News, 25 June 2010. Available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/asia\\_pacific/10410897.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/asia_pacific/10410897.stm).

<sup>28</sup> Australian Greens, "Policy E6: International Relations." Available at <http://greens.org.au/node/781>.

<sup>29</sup> Ian McAllister and Juliet Clark, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study, 1987–2007* (Canberra: May 2008), 12. Available at <http://assda.anu.edu.au/aestrends.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, 16, 55, indicating clearly that between 2001 and 2007, a convergence occurred in the minds of voters. In 2001, when voters were asked "Whose policies – the Labor Party's or the Liberal-National Coalition's would you say

level of genuine bipartisanship on the Afghanistan mission, perhaps best illustrated by the willingness of both Howard and Rudd to set aside campaigning and attend the funeral for a soldier killed in Afghanistan during the election campaign.<sup>31</sup>

In Canada, by contrast, the Afghanistan mission became a highly partisan issue after the deployment of the battle group to Kandahar at the end of 2005, with all four political parties unabashedly using the mission for partisan electoral purposes. The division arose early in the mandate of the Conservative minority government that had come to power in the January 2006 elections. One of Harper's campaign promises had been that a Conservative government would seek the explicit approval of Parliament for the deployment of Canadian forces abroad, and so introduced a resolution approving of the Kandahar deployment until 2009 when the new Parliament opened.

At first blush, it might be expected that this resolution would be supported by the Liberals, now the official opposition. After all, it had been a Liberal government that had committed the battle group to Kandahar in March 2005. Moreover, Bill Graham, appointed interim leader when Martin resigned after the election, had been foreign minister when the Martin government had made the decision to deploy to Kandahar, and not surprisingly supported the resolution. However, the deep divisions between Martin's supporters and the supporters of former prime minister Jean Chrétien that had wracked the Liberal party in the early 2000s as Martin sought to displace Chrétien as leader resurfaced once Martin resigned. Many of the 103 Liberal MPs, some of whom had been deeply opposed to Martin's Kandahar decision, decided to defy Graham and oppose the resolution.

As a result, when the resolution approving the mission came to a vote in May 2006, it faced considerable opposition. In addition to the disaffected Liberals, the resolution was also opposed by the two smaller parties, the Bloc Québécois, a separatist party with 51 MPs, all from Québec, and the New Democratic Party, Canada's social democratic party, with 29 MPs. The resolution passed, but only by narrow margin of four votes, 149–145.

The parliamentary opposition to the mission became more entrenched in December 2006, when Stéphane Dion, a Chrétienite and one of those who had opposed the May resolution, was selected as Liberal leader. Under his leadership, the Liberals sought to capitalize on the tepid public support for the mission by pushing the government. In April 2007, the Liberals introduced a resolution that would have forced a Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2009. This resolution was defeated, but not by a wide margin, 150–134, and only because all of the opposition parties wanted to score points against the government, but did not want to have an election called (even though this was not a matter of confidence). Polls revealed that support for the parties had not changed at all over the previous year,<sup>32</sup> giving all of the parties a powerful reason to avoid precipitating an election. All the parties thus played a careful game of aligning themselves so that the government would be sustained. With the BQ lining up to vote with the Liberals, the NDP were forced to prop up the Conservative minority government, and had to justify their voting against the Liberal motion

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come closer to your own views on each of these issues?" there was a 29-point gap between the ALP and the Coalition on terrorism policies. By 2007, that gap had narrowed to five points.

<sup>31</sup> See the photograph from *The Age*, 18 October 2007, of Howard and Rudd offering condolences to the widow of Trooper David Pearce, reprinted in Nossal, "Unavoidable Shadow of Past Wars," 95.

<sup>32</sup> By early 2007, the Conservatives were stuck in the high 30s, the Liberals in the high 20s/low 30s, the NDP at 12-15, and the BQ at 8-10 nationally (i.e., 30-40 in Québec): Poll results for the party standings from February 2006 to April 2008 listed at <http://www.nodice.ca/elections/canada/polls.php>.

using pretzel logic: they argued that since they were in favour of an *immediate* withdrawal from Afghanistan, they could not possibly support a motion that set 2009 as the withdrawal date.

By early 2008, it is clear that Harper had decided to try to remove Afghanistan as a political issue as the Conservatives prepared for an election expected later in the year. Public opinion remained only tepidly in favour of the mission, with strong pockets of opposition throughout the country, but particularly in Québec, where the Conservatives hoped to make electoral inroads against the Bloc.<sup>33</sup> In addition, throughout 2007 the government faced periodic criticism of its handling of Afghans who were detained by Canadian forces, since there were allegations that detainees turned over to Afghan authorities were being tortured.<sup>34</sup>

Following the 2007 vote, Harper appointed a blue-ribbon panel, headed by John Manley, a former deputy prime minister in the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, to advise it on future options. In January 2008, the Manley commission recommended that the government extend Canada's involvement beyond 2009.<sup>35</sup> Harper announced plans to introduce a motion extending the mission, intimating that he would regard the vote on an extension as a matter of confidence, which meant that a defeat would trigger an election. With the polling numbers continuing to remain virtually unchanged for a second year in a row, Dion and the Liberals decided to cooperate with the Conservatives rather than using the tactic of “whipped abstentions” to ensure the Conservative government's survival.<sup>36</sup> The two leaders fashioned a compromise extension proposal that both parties could vote for. With the survival of the Conservatives thus assured, the NDP and the BQ were secure in symbolically voting against the extension, which passed 197–77.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of this *faux* bipartisanship, where parties agree on a policy option not because they agree on the policy, but for reasons of pure electoral expediency, the issue of the mission to Afghanistan simply disappeared from the Canadian political agenda in 2007. Harper ensured that the bipartisan silence extended into the election campaign that was called in September. On 7 September 2007, he asked the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and call an election for 14 October; on 10 September the prime minister went out of his way to remind voters that Afghanistan was, in essence, off the table as an election.<sup>38</sup>

### *Justifications for the Mission*

The final difference was in how the contemporary Afghanistan mission was framed and justified by the political leadership, i.e., how the mission as it evolved after 2006 was “sold” to Australians and Canadians.

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<sup>33</sup> Stéphane Roussel and Jean-Christophe Boucher, 2008. “The Myth of the Pacific Society: Quebec's Contemporary Strategic Culture,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38 (2008), 165–89.

<sup>34</sup> Graeme Smith, “From Canadian custody into cruel hands,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 April 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, *Report*, John Manley, chair (Ottawa, 2008), [http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection\\_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf) (hereafter *Manley Report*).

<sup>36</sup> So fearful were the Liberals of an election during this period that Dion turned to “whipped abstentions” to sustain the Conservatives in power: this innovative (and apparently unprecedented) tactic involved the Liberal whip identifying the number of abstentions needed to ensure that the government would not be defeated on a vote; MPs were then whipped to abstain on the vote.

<sup>37</sup> For an exploration of the parliamentary manoeuvrings between 2006 and 2008, see Kim Richard Nossal, “No Exit: Canada and the ‘War without End’ in Afghanistan,” in Hans-Georg Ehrhart and Charles C. Pentland, eds., *The Afghanistan Challenge: Hard Realities and Strategic Choices* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 157–73.

<sup>38</sup> “Harper says 2011 ‘end date’ for Afghanistan mission,” *CBC.ca*, 10 September 2006.

In Australia, Howard consistently justified participation in the Afghanistan mission by reference to the need to deny extremist Islamist elements access to territory where they could return to planning terrorist attacks against the West.<sup>39</sup> Rudd, who inherited the mission from Howard, used exactly the same justificatory rhetoric to explain the Australian commitment as it evolved after 2006. In his thirty months in the prime ministership, Rudd also embraced other elements of policy that had been established under Howard. First, there was no “exit strategy” contemplated: Rudd consistently articulated a commitment to be there “for the long haul,” as he used to put it, and a refusal to consider leaving Afghanistan or coalition partners “in the lurch.” Only in the last week of his time in office did Rudd bruit the need for a time limit for Australian participation. Second, like Howard, Rudd consistently refused to consider dramatically expanding Australia’s responsibilities. For example, when the Netherlands announced that it was withdrawing from Oruzgan, Rudd explicitly refused importunities from the Obama administration to take the Dutch role. While Gillard has not yet sought to justify the mission, her promise to continue the policies of the “Australian government” suggests that she is likely to embrace the justificatory rhetoric used by Howard and Rudd.

Like Rudd, Harper inherited the mission from the previous Liberal government of Paul Martin. Martin had offered no meaningful justification when his government decided in March 2005 to move a Canadian battle group to Kandahar and take over the provincial reconstruction team for that province. As Boucher notes, the Martin government “justification” for the deployment to Kandahar did not focus on Afghanistan specifically; instead, “Afghanistan was folded into more general discussions of Canada’s international commitments and of the need to stabilize failing states.”<sup>40</sup>

By contrast, Stephen Harper was prepared to try to justify the mission on its own terms. However, his first major speech – given on a highly symbolic prime ministerial visit to the troops in Kandahar – was a largely incoherent mishmash of different justifications. First, he advanced the standard “national interest” argument: Canadian security depended on ensuring that Afghanistan did not again become an incubator for terrorist attacks, reminding his audience of the Canadians who had died in the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and of the inclusion of Canada on the list of countries that al-Qaeda would seek to attack. But he also suggested that Canadian security was affected by the opium trade, which, he said, “wreaks its own destruction on the streets of our country.” And the prime minister invoked three other justifications for the mission: the importance of a country such as Canada taking a leadership role in global politics, the importance of the humanitarian mission, and the importance of “standing up for Canadian values.” He also promised that Canada would remain in Afghanistan for the long haul. “There may be some who want to cut and run,” he noted, but claimed that “cutting and running is not ... the Canadian way. We don’t make a commitment and then run away at the first sign of trouble.”<sup>41</sup> This mix of justifications was sounded throughout 2006 on numerous occasions by the prime minister and other “3-D” ministers in his cabinet: Gordon O’Connor, the minister of national defence; Peter MacKay, the minister of foreign affairs; and Josée Verner, the minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Howard’s justifications on *7:30 Report*, ABC News, 13 July 2005, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1413738.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Christophe Boucher, “Selling Afghanistan: A Discourse Analysis of Canada’s Military Intervention, 2001–08,” *International Journal* 64:3 (Summer 2009), 723.

<sup>41</sup> Canada, Prime Minister’s Office, “Address by the prime minister to the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan,” Kandahar, 13 March 2006. Available at <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1056>.

<sup>42</sup> Peter MacKay, “Canadian foreign policy and our leadership role in Afghanistan,” Ottawa, 30 October 2006; Gordon O’Connor, “Speaking notes for the Honourable Gordon J. O’Connor, PC, MP, minister of national defence for the NATO Parliamentary Association Meeting, Quebec City, 17 November 2006; available at

However, it was clear from the polling numbers throughout 2006 that the government's national-interest "message" on Afghanistan was not producing any change in public opinion: support was still tepid and there were still obvious pockets of opposition. As a result, the government began to change its message, increasingly seeking to justify what Canada was doing in Afghanistan in terms that focussed on helping Afghans.<sup>43</sup> Thus, for example, when the minister of national defence, Gordon O'Connor, engaged in a cross-country tour in early 2007 to galvanize support for the mission, his speaking notes contained only a brief opening reference to the threat of terrorism but then immediately turned to a discussion of Canadian assistance for Afghanistan. "As a nation," O'Connor said,

we identify ourselves by our desire to help others in need. Canadians recognize the dire straits of the Afghan people. Decades of civil war, years of extremist rule, a severe lack of basic infrastructure and public services, drought, poverty, drugs and corruption all plague this population. Canada has a long history of helping those in need, and as part of this NATO mission, we are continuing this noble tradition.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the rest of his address focused on how Canada was making a difference in Afghanistan, the positive consequences of Canadian assistance to the Afghan people, the consequences to those people of the return of the Taliban, and a tribute to Canadian forces. Apart from the two brief sentences about terrorism at the outset, O'Connor did not frame his justification in terms of national interests. He never once mentioned the United States. Indeed, by June 2008, when the government reported to Parliament on the progress being made in Afghanistan, there were no longer any references to the national interest, and only a brief reference to preventing Afghanistan from becoming a base for terrorism. Rather, the report indicated that "these are the objectives of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan – to contribute to Afghanistan's future as a better governed, more peaceful and more security country."<sup>45</sup>

When this change in justification *still* did not move public opinion, it is clear that Harper simply gave up trying to change Canadians' minds on the mission. While he had not participated in the parliamentary debate in March 2008, leaving open the possibility that he would revisit the Afghanistan pull-out date later, by the fall of 2008, as noted above, he closed the door, committing his government to withdrawing in 2011, thus taking the war completely off the table. Nor did he try after that to change any minds: the last speech on Afghanistan he gave was in May 2009. Moreover, his government has not revisited the decision, even after President Barack Obama launched a "surge" of American troops and put a reinvigorated counter-insurgency strategy in place. Indeed, in April 2010, Harper's office began to put about the idea that for at least two years the prime minister had been having "deep doubts" about the mission.<sup>46</sup> In short, with the Afghanistan

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<http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?cat=08&id=2145>; Josée Verner, "Canada's contribution to the reconstruction process in Afghanistan," 15 November 2006; available at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/eng/ANI-1116155637-SKG>.

<sup>43</sup> Fletcher, Bastedo and Hove, "Losing Heart"; Boucher, "Selling Afghanistan."

<sup>44</sup> Gordon O'Connor, "Speaking notes for the Honourable Gordon J. O'Connor, minister of national defence, for the January cross-country tour," Edmonton, 20 January 2007; available at <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?cat=08&id=2181>.

<sup>45</sup> Government of Canada, *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan: Setting a Course to 2011*. June report to Parliament, Ottawa, May 2008, 16. Available at [http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/Afghrep\\_en.pdf](http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/Afghrep_en.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Campbell Clark, "Harper-Karzai rift reveal PM's deep doubts about Afghanistan," *Globe and Mail*, 7 April 2010.

mission essentially off the table, Harper seems happy simply to wait until 2011, claiming that the government is bound by the parliamentary resolution of March 2008.

The justifications offered by the Australian and Canadian governments for their involvement in the Afghanistan mission offer two contrasting styles. On the one hand, the Australian governments of both John Howard and Kevin Rudd offered what on the surface was a simple (and simplistic) justification that did not change over the years: Australia was in Afghanistan to ensure that al-Qaeda did not re-establish itself.

To be sure, underlying this formal justification was an unstated *Realpolitik* subtext that was never openly articulated by political leaders, but was openly acknowledged by elites. In this view, Australian participation in the mission was driven by three sets of interests, none of which had anything to do with preventing al-Qaeda from re-establishing itself and attacking Australia. First, it was important for Australia to “be there” with the Americans. Indeed, Kevin Rudd did not hesitate to mirror his rhetoric on Afghanistan on Harold Holt’s famous pledge during the Vietnam War. At a visit with President Lyndon Baines Johnson at the White House in June 1966, Holt had pledged that Australia would be in Vietnam “as long as it seems necessary” and amused Johnson by declaring grandly that Australia “will be all the way with LBJ.”<sup>47</sup> Thirty-four years later, Rudd would use similar language about Afghanistan. In November 2009, he promised that “We from Australia will remain for the long haul.”<sup>48</sup> In February 2010, commenting on the NATO offensive against the Taliban around Marja in Helmand province, the prime minister noted “That’s why we are there with the Americans all the way.”<sup>49</sup> Second, there would be global repercussions if the United States and NATO were seen to lose this war.<sup>50</sup> Third, there was a countervailing interest, equally driven by realism, in avoiding mission creep and over-commitment. Hence, there was widespread agreement that the Australian contribution was “about right,” as Rudd put it on many occasions, and that there should be no “open [or blank] cheque” given to the alliance.<sup>51</sup>

The justifications on offer in Australia – both those openly articulated and those “understood” – stand in marked contrast to the justifications advanced in Canada. After studying every speech on Afghanistan given by Canadian ministers from 2001 to 2008, Jean-Christophe Boucher concludes that “the Canadian government’s message on Afghanistan has been chaotic for most of the past seven years,” with the result that the government “has not succeeded in clearly communicating the logic behind Canada’s intervention and actions in Afghanistan.”<sup>52</sup> Boucher is not being inappropriately unkind: the government’s justifications, advanced scattershot in what appears to be the vague hope that some of the justifications advanced would find some resonance somewhere in the population, were indeed totally incoherent. And while in Australia there was a *Realpolitik* understanding of why it was in the national interest to “be there” with the United

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<sup>47</sup> “Johnson and Australian leader reaffirm their goals on Asia,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1966, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Katharine Murphy, “We’re in Afghanistan for long haul, PM tells troops,” *The Age*, 12 November 2009.

<sup>49</sup> “Forces ramp up pressure in Taliban stronghold,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February 2010.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Scott Burchill and Kristian Lewis, “Protecting US prestige the only reason to stay in Afghanistan,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 2010.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Dennis Shanahan, “Kevin Rudd in Bucharest for NATO summit on Afghanistan,” *The Australian*, 3 April 2008; “Two Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan,” *ABC News*, 8 June 2010; available at <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s2921802.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Boucher, “Selling Afghanistan,” 718.

States, and why Australian interests would not be served by a Western failure in Afghanistan, no such analysis can be found in Canada.

So what was the logic at work? There was undoubtedly a logic in the minds of those who committed the battle group to Kandahar in March 2005, though we have two conflicting accounts of that decision. On the one hand, Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang claim that the Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, pushed the Kandahar assignment on an unwilling Martin government in an effort to revitalize the Canadian Forces.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Hillier, in his memoirs, claims that the Martin government had already decided on Kandahar and that he himself had pressed Martin for a deployment to Kabul.<sup>54</sup> Whose account is more accurate cannot be known at this point. However, what we do know is that Stein and Lang have very close ties to the Liberal Party, which has a deep interest in distancing itself from the costly Kandahar mission that it authorized when it was in government.

Certainly there was a deep connection between the Afghanistan mission and the anger in the United States that had been created by the Canadian refusal to join the “coalition of the willing” in Iraq. As Bill Graham, at that time the minister of foreign affairs, admitted to Stein and Lang, “There was no question, every time we talked about the Afghan mission, it gave us cover for not going into Iraq.”<sup>55</sup> Likewise, a clear consensus appeared to have emerged in Ottawa in early 2005 that a battle group deployed to Kandahar to what at that time was still the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom would be a good way of repairing the damage to the Canadian-American relationship that had been done by Chrétien’s decision on Iraq and the decision of the Martin government to reject Canadian participation in Ballistic Missile Defense in February 2005. Although Martin was to claim later that he did not agree with this view, the fact is that the cabinet that he headed approved the deployment in May 2005.

But once the Canadian battle group was in Kandahar, can we discover a coherent rationale for the continuation of the mission? The incoherence of the justifications on offer – and the willingness of all of the political parties to treat the Afghanistan issue as nothing more than a ploy for electoral gamesmanship – strongly suggests that there was no real strategic thought given to the mission after 2006 by any of the parties in Ottawa. For the Bloc and the NDP, the only evident rationale was to embarrass the Conservative government by calling for a withdrawal, though the Bloc adopted a more nuanced position than the NDP by recognizing that the withdrawal could not be immediate, for fear of leaving both Afghans and allies in the lurch. For the Liberals, deeply divided over the mission, and for the Conservative government, the main purpose of the mission after 2006 was simply to get the issue off the agenda, and keep it from becoming an electoral issue. In short, in Canada Afghanistan has been all about votes: the Harper government came to believe that since there aren’t any votes in the mission, it should be abandoned, and the sooner the better. And because the Canadians, unlike the Australians, do not have to worry about the consequences of not being there with the Americans,<sup>56</sup> there is no countervailing strategic rationale for remaining in Afghanistan.

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<sup>53</sup> Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*.

<sup>54</sup> Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> For a structural explanation of Canada’s “freedom of manoeuvre” in Afghanistan, see Christopher Kirkey and Nicholas Ostroy, “Why is Canada in Afghanistan? Explaining Canada’s Military Commitment,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40:2 (June 2010), 200–213.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the similarities observed in public opinion about the Afghanistan mission in Australia and Canada must be hesitant, ambiguous and inconclusive, since public opinion polls do not plumb the reasons for the sentiments expressed. We are thus left to offer what cannot be more than plausible guesses why the polls look as they do.

First, it should be recognized that there must be some Australians – and approximately the same number of Canadians – who are convinced of the rightness of the mission, since the polling results are not entirely negative. Of course, we cannot know unambiguously why respondents support the mission. One possibility is that those in favour of the mission might do so because they are indeed convinced by the official justifications offered by their political leaders. Another alternative is that some citizens might support the mission not because of what their political leaders are telling them, but because of their own particular assessments, independently arrived at. Yet another alternative is that some support for the mission may be driven by the so-called “sunk cost effect,” in which citizens seek to give meaning to the loss of life suffered by members of their armed forces by supporting the mission, thus avoiding having to conclude that those who lost their lives did so in vain or for nought.<sup>57</sup>

Second, it should be recognized that in neither Australia nor Canada have citizens been provided with the argument that might make some sense to them: an argument, grounded in *Realpolitik*, that articulates clearly the highly negative consequences of allowing the enemy to prevail in Afghanistan at this juncture. Such an argument would focus not on “the return of al-Qaeda” but instead on the implications for the future of a nuclear-armed Pakistan if extremist Pashtuns dominated in southern Afghanistan and pushed into Pakistan. It would force politicians in both Canberra and Ottawa to abandon their silence about the complicity of the Pakistani government – particularly the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – in the deaths of so many Australians and Canadians. Such a *Realpolitik* argument would also have to address the implications for the relationship with the United States of forcing the US to backfill holes left by departing allies. Such an argument would also have to address the *Realpolitik* (not the *Idealpolitik*, or humanitarian) consequences of leaving Afghans to the tender mercies of a resurgent Taliban.

It is true that framing this war in explicitly *Realpolitik* terms would be difficult. First, many politicians themselves, particularly in Canada, simply do not see the world in such terms. Moreover, because ordinary citizens have been so unused to having foreign policy decisions framed in *Realpolitik* terms, it is possible that trying to explain Afghanistan in such terms would be, as Sir Humphrey Appleby might put it, “very courageous.”

However, the present justifications on offer in both Australia and Canada for participating in the mission in Afghanistan are, it is plausible to suggest, not persuading citizens. Indeed, it could be argued that the reason for the similarity in the tepidness evident in both countries lies in the dynamic identified by Jon Western: bluntly put, large numbers of Australians and Canadians do not support the mission because the reasons on offer from their governors simply do not make much sense.

The commonest trope employed by policy-makers, particularly in Australia – keeping al-Qaeda from attacking the West – flies in the face of the strategic reality that al-Qaeda is no longer a factor in the politics of Afghanistan, the region more broadly, or even globally. The threat that al-Qaeda and its leadership pose to

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<sup>57</sup> Hal R. Arkes and Catherine Blumer, “The Psychology of Sunk Cost,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 35:1 (February 1985), 124-40: the “sunk cost effect” is the “greater tendency to continue an endeavor once an investment in money, effort, or time has been made. The prior investment, which is motivating the present decision to continue, does so despite the fact that it objectively should not influence the decision.” In Canada, the Manley panel invoked this effect, claiming that “Canadian interests and values, and Canadian lives, are now invested in Afghanistan. The sacrifices made there, by Canadians and their families, must be respected.” *Manley Report*, 32.

the West now is the inspiration that the movement and its leadership continue to offer to followers for attacks on “crusaders” and Western interests, an inspiration that does not require a territorial base in Afghanistan, as the global terrorist attacks throughout the 2000s demonstrated. Nor has the justification of keeping the Taliban from returning to Afghanistan been sufficiently contextualized by decision-makers to permit citizens to make much sense of this goal given the overwhelming evidence that Taliban elements of different types, and many other anti-Western elements besides, are driving the insurgency in Afghanistan.

The humanitarian justifications that dominate Canadian discourse are no more compelling. On the contrary: all the evidence is that the security situation in Afghanistan is getting worse, bedeviling ISAF’s efforts to create a Western-style Weberian state apparatus within a community that manifestly has little interest in such institutions. Likewise, there is too much evidence that widespread illiteracy and innumeracy, together with a widespread attachment to tribal identity and a xenophobic and fundamentalist *Weltanschauung*, make the modernizing/Westernizing project something that cannot be achieved in the short timeframes established by ISAF governments. And while there are undoubtedly “good works” achieved by the ISAF mission, such good works are too frequently undone by insurgents who are more than willing to blow up freshly opened schools, intimidate or kill those Afghans associated with the “occupiers,” and maximize insecurity among the populace via suicide bombings and among ISAF forces by IED strikes.

In sum, despite the uncertainties of trying to analyse public opinion polls, what the results of five years of opinion polls in both countries do suggest is that despite the efforts of the governments in both countries to make sense of the Afghan mission, large numbers of Australians and Canadians simply are not buying what their governors are telling them about Afghanistan, confirming Western’s suggestion that governments simply cannot get away with flogging implausible arguments for putting the armed forces of the community in harm’s way. The case of the tepid support in Australia and Canada for the Afghanistan mission suggest that ordinary folks recognize, even if inchoately, a shonky argument when it is put to them.

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