



PEOPLE ARE THINKING Evi Mustel

Lest we forget, Canadians oppose war in Afghanistan



It has been more than six years since Canadian troops first arrived in Afghanistan and two years since Canada took on a more prominent role with Canadian troops redeployed to the Kandahar Province as part of international security forces. Canadian troops now have been in Afghanistan longer than they were engaged in either of the two world wars we remember each November 11. How do Canadians feel about Canada's continued involvement and presence in Afghanistan? Has it made an impact on the volatile country in any way?

Public opinion polls in Canada, as in other countries with a strong presence in Afghanistan, are showing signs of growing opposition to Canada's involvement and suggest a majority of Canadians not only disapprove of their military action but now believe the country is paying too high a price for its role in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, U.S. residents by and large believe their country was right to engage in military operations in Afghanistan. A Pew Research Centre survey revealed 65 per cent of Americans support their country's choice to use force in Afghanistan, and 61 per cent want the troops to stay there – even though 41 per cent are ready to admit that their efforts are not going very well.

When is enough – enough? A Canadian Press–Harris Decima survey taken in August found that 61 per cent of Canadians believe the cost of the military mission in lives and money is unacceptable, and 57 per cent do not want to stay longer in Afghanistan, even if a request came from the White House. While, only 33 per cent would favour an extension.

The survey also shows an overwhelming number of Canadians are uncertain about the success of the Afghanistan mission. When asked, overall, if they would say the mission in Afghanistan has been a success, a failure or "it is too soon to tell," the largest group (approximately 48 per cent) took the wait-and-see answer. Only 30 per cent declared the mission a success.

Could the 30 per cent be right? A recent poll conducted by Environics Research in partnership with CBC of close to 1,600 Afghans reveals the majority feel safer in comparison to five years ago with 51 per cent in agreement with the path their country is on. This is all thanks to the presence of international security forces from countries like Canada. In addition, 60 per cent of Afghans believe the presence of foreign troops has been good for their country with mentions made of increased security and better roads and schools because of reconstruction efforts.

Over the past decade global terrorism has become all too real. A Mustel Group poll asked what Canada can do to reduce its threat from terrorism; pulling out of Afghanistan and avoiding other conflict zones was one of the key suggestions.

Only a small proportion (four per cent) suggested strengthening our military resources. Others went on to suggest that Canada should stop its pro-military alliance with the U.S.

Instead, the public believes we should be fighting terrorism on our own soil. In addition to pulling out of Afghanistan, other common suggestions include improving immigration screening, enforcing or tightening immigration policies (e.g., deport criminals) and tightening security at our borders and access points.

Politicians and military often complain that the media pays too much attention to casualties, which dampens public enthusiasm for the mission. But others say the public is savvy and simply questioning whether the sacrifice has been worth it. That depends on how you look at it. **VLM**

AFGHANISTAN: FOR AND AGAINST **Do you support or oppose Canada's involvement in Afghanistan?**

Oppose	51%
Support	43%
Undecided	6%

Source: Mustel Group, 750 B.C. adults interviewed by telephone September 2-8, 2008

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Illustration by Bernie Lyon