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# AFGHANISTAN'S LESSONS: PART I

## Canada's Lessons

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Howard G. Coombs

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reflects on the evolution of Canada's whole-of-government approach in the context of international cooperation in Afghanistan. Although the effort resulted in great gains when Canadian Forces were actively involved in combat roles, the nation does not seem interested in maintaining the capability as a framework for quickly responding to current or future international crises.

Political scientist Stephen M. Saideman captured the incomplete state of Canada's post-Afghanistan learning with this simple advice: Canada should “not to do it again.”<sup>1</sup> Five years after the commitment ended, national introspection has been left to scholars attempting to understand the consequential changes. To comprehend the modifications resulting from Canada's experiences in Afghanistan, one must understand the shifts that occurred within the government during the conflict and then scrutinize the outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Finally, reflection can occur to determine if the efforts changed how Canada engages in post-Afghanistan missions and if there are lessons that have been learned and implemented.<sup>3</sup>

The unprecedented level of interdepartmental cooperation and involvement that was necessary to advance objectives in Afghanistan obviously made the effort unique. By the end of the combat mission in 2011, needs for integrated strategic coordination, planning, and guidance, as well as requirements for interoperational departments were accepted and applied. These were necessary to produce integrated effects, or impacts, in the mission area. Notably, other countries involved in this North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commitment, such as the United States, faced similar challenges, which also resulted in adaptation and innovation. This article demonstrates that, despite Canada identifying and implementing these lessons during the Canadian combat mission

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1 Stephen M. Saideman, “Lessons of History: What the Afghanistan Mission Teaches Canada,” *International Journal* 72, no. 1 (March 2017): 131.

2 Saideman, “Lessons of History,” 131.

3 The exception to this has been the ongoing Canadian Army Training and Doctrine Centre tactical lessons-learned project, which has produced a series of analytical and, where possible, scholarly monographs for the Canadian Army examining the “major lessons from our Kandahar operations by Corps and Capability.” See Lee Windsor, “Lessons Learned for Soldiers: The Royal Canadian Infantry Corps in Afghanistan,” *Dispatches* 17, no. 1 (December 2013): ii; and Lee Windsor, David Charters, and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 279.

in Afghanistan, the interagency, or whole-of-government, learning activity has not been integrated into national and international activities in the post-Afghanistan era. Ultimately, these “lessons identified” are not “lessons learned.” This lapse may have a deleterious impact on the ability of the Canadian government to address the challenges of such interagency cooperation in current and future interventions.

### **Afghanistan and Canada**

Canada’s early involvement in Afghanistan was depicted by Canadian researchers, Janice Gross Stein and J. Eugene Lang in their 2007 work, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*. Initially, Canada’s participation was to be limited to a post-9/11 combat mission in tandem with the United States during 2002. But this led to a much longer Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. The initial commitment of a light infantry battalion group within a United States Army brigade was followed with more than three successive years of continued involvement in the Afghan stabilization mission. In 2003, Canada generated the headquarters for a multinational brigade and an infantry battle group based in Kabul. The following year, Canadians assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

These obligations were succeeded by what was supposed to be provincial stabilization and capacity building that included establishing the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT). By 2006, Canadian Forces had inexorably migrated into participation in low-intensity conflict through counterinsurgency operations.<sup>4</sup> Canada’s role changed again in 2011 as it shifted from fighting in southern Afghanistan to giving advice and assistance within the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. By the end of the involvement in 2014, there were 165 Canadian deaths (158 soldiers, 7 civilians) and more than 1,800 wounded soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

The mission also tested the defense, diplomacy, and development approach created in 2003 as Canada expressed its foreign policy in conflicted regions.<sup>6</sup> This concept evolved into the ideas represented by the more inclusive “whole-of-government” expression of integrating all instruments of governance and development to produce a desired effect linked to national strategy. The growth of this integrated approach to the conflict in Afghanistan was well recognized by the end of Canada’s final year in Kandahar. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated:

Friends, behind every girl now in a classroom, behind every healthy baby in its mother’s arms, behind every farmer who can feed his family without taking up arms, behind all of this progress are innumerable acts of heroism,

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4 Janice Gross Stein and J. Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2007), 1–229, 244–45.

5 Stephen Azzi and Richard Foot, “Canada and the War in Afghanistan,” Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed July 15, 2019; and Brett Boudreau, email message to author, May 19, 2019.

6 Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 107–8.

of selfless devotion to duty by you, the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, our diplomats and our aid workers.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, if any discernable lessons arose for Canada from this conflict it was those associated with this methodology. The rebuilding of Afghanistan required integrating the efforts of those involved with defense, diplomacy, and development to achieve positive and lasting results in regenerating this war-torn nation.<sup>8</sup>

### Canadian Whole-of-Government Operations

Canada's intergovernmental efforts in Afghanistan evolved from nascent beginnings. The foundation of this campaign was laid in January 2004 when then Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier, the Canadian commander of the ISAF rotation V (ISAF V), entered into discussions about national challenges with President Hamid Karzai, who was leading the Afghanistan Transitional Authority (ATA). They identified the lack of unified action by Afghanistan, Canada, international community members, and NATO toward rebuilding Afghanistan. Without a common plan or a coordinating mechanism, the lack of coherency was weakening the potential of many positive nation-building outcomes. The lack of a shared approach also prevented ISAF V from moving beyond lower-order (tactical) military activities that could achieve immediate effects to higher-level, enduring strategic objectives.<sup>9</sup>

Hillier understood that without a coherent strategic concept that allowed all involved parties—military, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, donor institutions, the international community, and most importantly the ATA and Afghan people—to participate, no operational-level campaign could be created.<sup>10</sup> He also believed “rebuilding failed states or failing states was not a security, governance or economic problem; it was all three.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, he used his ISAF V staff, and later two Canadian officers with advanced planning backgrounds who were specifically tasked with assisting the

7 Stephen Harper, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada,” Canada, May 31, 2011.

8 Kimberley Unterganschnigg, “Canada’s Whole of Government Mission in Afghanistan—Lessons Learned,” *Canadian Military Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 16. The importance of Hillier’s role in the degree and form of Canada’s commitment in Afghanistan cannot be understated. Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 1.

9 The Afghan Transitional Authority was the temporary governing body of Afghanistan put in place by Loya Jirga, or traditional Afghan grand assembly, in June 2002; it lasted until national elections in October 2004 confirmed Karzai’s continuance as president. See Richard J. Ponzio, “Transforming Political Authority: UN Democratic Peacebuilding in Afghanistan,” *Global Governance* 13, no. 2 (April–June 2007): 260–63.

10 Howard G. Coombs and Rick Hillier, “Planning for Success: The Challenge of Applying Operational Art in Post Conflict Afghanistan,” *Canadian Military Journal* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 5–14. Hillier made many efforts to engage Canadian government support for his interagency approach during this time with some local success amongst Canadian officials, but not to the same degree back in Canada.

11 Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto ON: HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 2009), 389; and Serge Labbé, interview by the author, June 6, 2019. Labbé, the deputy chief of staff to Hillier’s headquarters, highlights Hillier’s emphasis on an interdepartmental approach as part of the mission, as well as his efforts to implement this within ISAF and through NATO Senior Civilian Representative Hikmet Çetin. Sadly, these ISAF efforts to engage NATO in a holistic approach did not seem to persist beyond Hillier’s departure in 2005.

Afghan Transitional Authority, to begin articulating a strategic concept released as “Creating a National Economy: The Path to Security and Stability in Afghanistan.” Though developmental, it specified ideas that were used to assist with developing governance and security. The core ideas later emerged within the *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*, an overarching Islamic Republic of Afghanistan policy document guiding the multiple activity streams working to rebuild Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

Recognizing the success of this effort, Karzai requested similar support after Hillier became the chief of the Canadian Defense Staff (CDS). Regrettably, this Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan only ran from 2005 to 2008, roughly the duration of Hillier’s tenure in the role. Since capacity building and assistance was not viewed by some in the former Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade as a Canadian military mission, it met its untimely demise as a result of interdepartmental politics.<sup>13</sup>

The termination of the strategic advisory team indicated the early challenges Canada faced in producing a whole-of-government approach. Difficulties ranged from orchestrating processes between different organizations, to overcoming uneasiness with civil-military cooperation, to calming outright hostilities and suspicions.<sup>14</sup> This friction translated into less than stellar results—for example, British General Sir David Richards, who commanded the ISAF in 2006, observed that it took months for Canada to deliver nonmilitary assistance in regions of Kandahar that had been affected by intense fighting. This delay exemplified the need for a whole-of-government approach to ensure the immediate gains of military forces could be followed with stabilizing effects from governance and development.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan, there were two heavily debated parliamentary votes—one in May 2006 and the other in March 2008—concerning the extension of the mission and its essential character.<sup>16</sup> The latter debate was informed by the results of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan convened by the Conservative Party in 2007 to make recommendations on Canada’s involvement in the mission. Based upon the interviews and the associated research, the panel conducted to consider the Afghan, Canadian, and allied perspectives, the Manley Report stated any recommendation would need to take the following factors into account: Canadian efforts and progress made to date in the course of stabilizing the security situation

12 Coombs and Hillier, “Planning for Success: The Challenge of Applying Operational Art in Post Conflict Afghanistan,” 5–14.

13 Michel-Henri St-Louis, “The Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan—Part of the Canadian Comprehensive Approach to Stability Operations,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 58–67.

14 Tara Holten et al., “The Relationship between Non-Governmental Organizations and the Canadian Forces,” in *Security Operations in the 21st Century: Canadian Perspectives on the Comprehensive Approach*, ed. Michael Rostek and Peter Gizewski (Montreal, ON: School of Policy Studies and McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 218–23.

15 Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 272; 259–83.

16 Geoffrey Hayes, “Canada in Afghanistan,” in *Afghanistan: Transition under Threat*, ed. Geoffrey Hayes and Mark Sedra (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2008), 292–94.

in Afghanistan; the significant investment of resources, energy, and infrastructure already made by Canada; the possibility of deterioration in the security as well as the development aspects of potential future options; NATO and United Nations (UN) objectives to create better conditions for Afghans and prevent the reestablishment of terrorist groups in Afghanistan; and Canada's reputation internationally.

The report outlined a few possible options regarding the level of continued Canadian engagement in Afghanistan during 2009 that ranged from leaving the Afghanistan mission to continuing full involvement as well as variations between these two extremes. But it ultimately concluded—considering Canadian efforts and sacrifice to date, NATO and UN commitments, and the need to make life better for Afghans—Canadian involvement should continue. The findings raised fundamental questions: “How do we move from a military role to a civilian one, and how do we oversee a shift in responsibility for Afghanistan's security from the international community to Afghans themselves?”<sup>17</sup>

The Manley Report argued security forces needed to be strengthened, agriculture encouraged, government institutions strengthened, and national infrastructure restored. The Canadian portion of this plan could only be achieved through a holistic governmental approach with clear benchmarks that supported the “Afghanistan Compact” on achieving peace and security in Afghanistan and a body for strategic-level coordination, assessment, public reporting, and achieving these integrated objectives.<sup>18</sup>

Hillier notes an important outcome of this period of debate in Canadian politics was the development of a defense policy that provided the overarching strategy for the use of Canada's military.<sup>19</sup> The *Canada First Defence Strategy* mandated the Canadian Forces “be a fully integrated, flexible, multi-role and combat-capable military, working in partnership with the knowledgeable and responsive civilian personnel of the Department of National Defence. This integrated Defence team will constitute a key element of a whole-of-government approach to meeting security requirements, both domestically and internationally.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, this very public political debate created recognition of the breadth and complexity of the Afghan challenge, which in turn contributed to a substantial evolution in both the strategic whole-of-government coordination framework in Ottawa as well as the corresponding mission structure and civilian resourcing in Afghanistan. The Manley Report, and the new defense policy, ushered in a new Canadian political perspective on the whole-of-government concept.

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17 John Manley, *Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan* (Ottawa, Ontario: Publishing and Depository Services, Public Works and Government Services of Canada, 2008), 8.

18 “The Afghanistan Compact” (agreement, London Conference on Afghanistan, January 31–February 1, 2006).

19 Hillier, *Soldier First*, 470–71.

20 Canada, Department of National Defense (DND), *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa, Ontario: DND, 2008), 3–4.

Resultantly, by early 2008, Canadian efforts in Afghanistan were, for the first time, overseen by a cabinet committee on Afghanistan that was supported by the newly created Afghanistan Task Force in the Privy Council Office. The activities of the Afghanistan Task Force were reported by the clerk of the Privy Council directly to the prime minister and supported the Cabinet committee. Although mainly staffed by senior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the task force included representatives from several other departments including the Department of National Defense and the Canadian International Development Agency. This whole-of-government innovation was a first in Canadian political affairs.<sup>21</sup>

In March 2008, the Canadian government unveiled a detailed set of six whole-of-government policy objectives for the mission derived from the Manley Report and the “Afghanistan Compact.” These were: “Enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order; strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver basic services; provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable people; enhance border security with facilitation of Afghan-Pakistani dialogue; help advance Afghanistan’s democratic governance; and facilitate Afghan-led political reconciliation.”<sup>22</sup>

Benchmarks were developed to help report on the progress achieved on key priorities that included four regional objectives for Kandahar and two national objectives for Afghanistan. The first regional measure, a secure environment and establishment of law and order would be accomplished by building the capacity of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Supporting efforts were identified in the areas of justice and corrections. Second, jobs would be created, education would be provided, and essential services, such as water, would be made available. Third, humanitarian assistance would be delivered to people in need. Fourth, the management and security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border would be improved. The national measures included encouraging Afghan institutions that were central to Canada’s Kandahar priorities and supporting democratic processes such as elections. The ultimate objective was that the Canadian efforts would contribute to Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts aimed at weakening the insurgency and fostering a sustainable peace.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequently, these six policy objectives and their corresponding efforts facilitated the integration of Canadian officials into Canadian

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21 Nicholas Gammer, “Integrating Civilian-Military Operations: The Comprehensive Approach and the ATF Experience, 2008–2009” (conference paper, Canadian Political Science Association Conference, University of Alberta, Canada, June 13–15, 2012); and Brigadier-General Dean Milner, OMM, CD, Commander Joint Task Force Afghanistan 5-10, “Helping Afghans Secure a Brighter Future ROSHANA SABAH” (presentation, Conference of Defense Associations in Ottawa, Ontario, June 18, 2010).

22 Canada, Privy Council Office, *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Quarterly Report to Parliament for the Period of October 1 to December 31, 2010* (Ottawa, Ontario: Government of Canada, 2010), 2–3.

23 “Backgrounder: Canada’s Six Priorities in Afghanistan,” Government of Canada, accessed May 7, 2009.

military operations. It was the expression of political interest in and the coordination of a comprehensive governmental approach through the Privy Council Office and the Cabinet. This teamwork was further encouraged by the requirement to provide corresponding detailed quarterly assessment of activities to the Parliament of Canada. As a result, by the end of the combat mission, this whole-of-government process included not only the Canadian Forces, the Department of Foreign Affairs and National Trade, and the Canadian International Development Agency, but also other government departments like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Correctional Service of Canada.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted, however, that even with increased harmonization among the efforts of all partners throughout this time, strategic communications and public affairs remained inconsistently visualized and carried out by the various participants. Former Director of Communications of the Afghanistan Task Force Colonel Brett Boudreau observed the coordination structures created when the task force was established had a positive impact:

This forcing function to work together better, faster and in a more integrated fashion over time showed real value from a policy and communications perspective both in theatre and at respective departmental [headquarters] HQs—it is perhaps why public support for the mission and particularly for “the troops,” remained generally consistent even in the face of a significant number of Canadian killed and wounded, as well as the considerable financial cost. By 2012 though, after a major national effort of 10 years, the lack of positive results or much substantive evidence of real progress on the ground coupled with the public perception that NATO (excepting the [United States], [United Kingdom] and Netherlands) had “abandoned” Canada in the South during heavy fighting there, continues today to negatively impact Canadian public perceptions of the Afghanistan mission.<sup>25</sup>

From this, one could opine that the strength, and the weakness, for the Canadian mission over these years was its overarching focus on building Afghan capacity. As much as the international community collectively *underestimated* the strength of the insurgency, it *overestimated* the ability of Afghan leadership, in governance and in security efforts, to assume full responsibility for responding to the challenges posed by the insurgency. Under these circumstances, Canadian activities in Kandahar revolved around balancing efforts to enable Afghan civilian authorities and security forces, while at the same time neutralizing the insurgents.

With the success of the 2007 American military surge in Iraq and the renewed commitment to ISAF after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, the United States became reinvested in the dilemmas of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the Americans provided a strategic vision and the resources necessary to create a multinational counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. With an influx of tens of thousands of American troops, and more clearly defined international

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<sup>24</sup> Milner, presentation; and Howard G. Coombs, “Whole of Government Operations by Task Force Kandahar September 2010 to July 2011,” (presentation, Conference of Defense Associations in Ottawa, Ontario November 3, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Brett Boudreau, email message to author, May 16, 2019.



objectives in late 2009, the various national campaigns became more fully integrated into a broader international counterinsurgency and nation-building campaign. Taken as a whole, this improved strategic coherence—on top of the flow of American personnel and material—renewed international interest in Afghanistan and gave fresh impetus to NATO efforts to resolve the expanding violence. It was within this increased security context that a relatively robust Canadian whole-of-government approach developed in Kandahar province and the role of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team evolved.<sup>26</sup>

In 2008, NATO created a similar comprehensive approach. In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of the ISAF, identified a lack of coordination between military and nonmilitary operations as inimical to achieving ISAF security objectives. As a result, many of the major nonmilitary organizations operating in Afghanistan met for a conference in Kabul in 2010. Mark Sedwill, NATO's senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, then raised the issue of implementing an effective comprehensive approach and the necessity of a NATO-level coordination mechanism through the *NATO Senior Civilian Representative Report: A Comprehensive Approach Lessons Learned in Afghanistan*. The ideas put forward by Sedwill never came to fruition and arguably the ability of ISAF to facilitate the provision of a secure environment was, in turn, diminished.<sup>27</sup>

### **Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team**

The objectives in the Manley Report were achieved as Canada exercised the whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan at the regional and national levels during the final year of the combat mission. Quarterly reports by the Afghanistan Task Force kept the Canadian government apprised of the progress. The reconstruction team, which had become a combined Canadian-American effort, included 62 Canadian civilians. The group worked closely with Afghanistan's governing structure, through the Office of the Provincial Governor, the Provincial Ministries, and the Provincial Council, to identify and to support the implementation of priority projects throughout the region. The Canadian staff in this organization was comprised of diplomats, aid workers, corrections officers, and civilian police who shared the mission of reconnecting Kandaharis with an effective, representative government. In support of these efforts the reconstruction team collaborated with Canadian Forces, American civilian and military partners, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The group partnered with the Attorney General's Office and the Provincial Court on justice issues, the Afghan National Police, the Afghan National Army, and the Central Prison Directorate.

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26 James A. Russell, "Into the Great Wadi: The United States and the War in Afghanistan," in *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, ed. Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 68–72; and Stephen M. Saideman, "Canadian Forces in Afghanistan: Minority Government," in Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation*, 221.

27 The initiative was never implemented. Labbé, interview.

The Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team worked intimately with Tooryalai Wesa, then governor of Kandahar, and his office. As the appointed provincial executive officer, Wesa's direction and leadership was important to Canada. As such, the team assisted him with planning, budgeting, and coordinating major projects. In this fashion, the organization and its efforts were aligned with provincial ministry projects, plans, and budgets to support the people of Kandahar.

The reconstruction team had a strong relationship with the Provincial Council.<sup>28</sup> As a body of elected representatives who listened and mediated disputes in the Afghan tradition, the council encouraged people and the civil society to participate in governance. This effort provided an important adjunct to the provincial administration by helping the people find common ground with the government.

District stabilization teams, comprised of small groups of American and Canadian government advisors with military assistance, worked closely with their Afghan counterparts outside the provincial capital, in the district ministries, and alongside district governors to increase local capacity. The measurable growth of governance between 2010 and 2011 was, in no small part, due to the efforts of these teams of dedicated professionals.

Moreover, the six policy objectives linked with the Afghanistan Compact, served as an overarching term of reference for the civilian components of the mission—for example, Canada created a unique operational capacity that increased the civilian role in Kandahar. This expanded whole-of-government approach enabled a more robust partnership with the Afghan provincial government, and it was supported by programs financed by Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian International Development Agency. Some of these initiatives included the Arghandab Irrigation Rehabilitation Project, which involved one of the largest dams in Afghanistan; the development of 50 schools; eradicating polio; improving the primary detention center in the region; training police; and improving government infrastructure.

As Canada's plans in Kandahar were achieved, the Canadian staff of the KPRT gradually relocated to Kabul or returned to Canada. In January 2011, Canada transferred leadership of the reconstruction team to the United States as part of the Canadian process of winding down its activities in Afghanistan. And, Canadians and Americans served together closely until the end of the Canadian combat mission in 2011 so as to achieve significant progress in both Afghan development and governance.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Throughout this period, the Chair of the Provincial Council was the powerful half brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, known as AWK. AWK was murdered by a bodyguard in July 2011. "Bodyguard Kills Hamid Karzai's Half-Brother," CTV News, accessed May 19, 2012.

29 Tim Martin, representative of Canada in Kandahar from August 2010 to July 2011 (speech, Kandahar Provincial Council, Kandahar City, Afghanistan, March 6, 2011).

### **Task Force Kandahar**

Canadian and American military forces in the Canadian-led brigade known as Task Force Kandahar implemented Manley Report-based initiatives in conjunction with the KPRT to ensure all military activities were coordinated within a whole-of-government framework. Security aims were to recruit, equip, and organize community policing; to train, mentor, and partner with an increasingly independent Afghan National Army; and to deny insurgents influence on the population. Governance goals included creating responsible and responsive district leadership that subordinated to the governor; developing representative subnational processes, such as community meetings called *shuras*; and establishing a capable ministry staff that delivered basic services. Finally, development objectives included establishing functional district development committees, village development representation, and increased economic capacity.

The task force worked toward a number of integrated measures of effectiveness in its whole-of-government approach. Within the area of security, it was necessary to ensure adequate numbers of capable Afghan police who were addressing village requirements and protecting, not preying on, the people. The Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) led both combined- and single service operations as well as integrated command and control, which was responsive to the district governor and village elders (such as maliks). When examining support to governance, it was necessary to reinforce and assist with creating responsible and responsive district governors and staff; representative and functioning district and village *shuras* and subnational processes; and provincial ministry representatives working at district centers and reacting to village requirements.

The task force developed the support needed to help with the establishment of functioning district development committees that represented the needs of local Afghans and managed centrally controlled funds. In turn, this village development representation connected to all the development activities that were coordinated through district governors. This cooperation enabled district governors to meet priorities set by the district, in conjunction with the villages, and a working rural and urban interface of markets, transportation, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

### **Canadian Whole-of-Government Lessons**

The Manley Report resulted in an amalgamation of various interdepartmental perspectives, objectives, programs, plans, and activities that directly underpinned the creation of a Canadian whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan over the last few years of the mission. This concept involved Canadian field partners and members of the international community as well as Afghan authorities at all levels. It was creative and responsive to the exigencies of Canada's most current intervention. While some detractors argue Canada's approach

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30 Milner, presentation; and Coombs, presentation.

to whole-of-government activities in Afghanistan has been replete with flaws, others more optimistically reframe this perspective and note Canada's engagement in the region is rich with lessons to be learned.

In early 2011, the Afghanistan whole-of-government lessons-learned project was launched by the Afghanistan Task Force. Subsequently, the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team organized a conference on the lessons learned to examine the multiagency experiences of the whole-of-government effort.<sup>31</sup> Participants looked at cross department civil-military binational cooperation, the evolution of the reconstruction team, and strategic communications, as well as contracting and implementing a "rule of law." Representatives utilized the 2010–11 experiences of the whole-of-government team in Kandahar to derive a series of recommendations for the Afghanistan Task Force:

1. The need to have expertise across the domains of security, governance, reconstruction, and development was highlighted. Without balanced civilian expertise and support, the host nation is unable to extend its influence into the communities. Two areas cited as lacking key Canadian civilian expertise in the conflict-ridden environment of Kandahar were agriculture and justice.
2. The need to integrate with other government departments, particularly the Canadian military prior to the deployment, was brought forward. Understanding other departmental cultures and modes of operation would have reduced friction between different organizations, as well as improved communications and effectiveness.
3. It was thought the binational, civil-military nature of the reconstruction team was effective. It reached across the province to the districts and assisted greatly in the handover of structures, programming, and operations.
4. The need for the deployed civilian field agencies of the Canadian government to be able to communicate to the media was emphasized. While the Canadian Department of Defense had great latitude in dealing with the media, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian International Developmental Agency did not, with a commensurate negative impact in informing the Canadian public of their activities and achievements. This disparity was stark and the Afghanistan Task Force focused considerable effort toward resolving it. Unfortunately, success was never truly achieved.
5. There is a need to standardize contracting procedures across the Canadian whole-of-government effort. While the practices of the Department of National Defense and the Canadian Forces are flexible

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31 DND, "3350-1 (JLLO) 'Report on Kandahar Whole of Government Lessons Learned Workshop,' 02 June 2011," 2; Canada, "Kandahar Lessons Learned Workshop, Task Force Kandahar and Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team," February 24, 2011; Sara Hradecky, email message to author, March 10, 2011; and Canada, Afghanistan Task Force, "Lessons Learned," 10. David Mulroney, deputy minister responsible for the Afghanistan Task Force, conceived a series of lessons-learned activities after the formation of the Afghanistan Task Force that were only possible as a result of the governance framework established by the Manley Report. Brett Boudreau, email, May 19, 2019.

and were deemed to represent the best practices, those of other departments were, at times, seen as problematic and cumbersome.

6. While Canadian expertise was recognized in the area of rule of law, a more comprehensive and detailed program that would reach to the districts and their people would have been more efficacious.<sup>32</sup>

The Afghanistan Task Force later put together the results of various inputs, like that of the reconstruction team, to create high-level perspectives on the results of Afghanistan's whole-of-government experience. These strategic observations reflected the evolution of the Afghanistan Task Force and its activities. Leading the list was the requirement for an interdepartmental assessment to establish clear national objectives and priorities. Related to this was the requirement for an interagency planning exercise to create common understanding and intent, plus establish operational guidance. Directly connected to the formation of the Afghanistan Task Force was the need to create coordinating bodies at the political level to produce an integrated approach across and within departments.

The necessity of enhancing cultural and process understanding between departments to set the conditions for successful intergovernmental collaboration was also suggested in a fashion similar to the recommendations expressed by the reconstruction team. This cooperation could be achieved through cross-department assignments, colocation, and shared predeployment preparations.

The need for deployable civilian capability was also highlighted. Such a resource would need decentralized authorities who were able to make appropriate and timely decisions and who would be part of a unified whole-of-government effort from the very beginning. In a nod to the quarterly reporting process implemented in Afghanistan, the need for a benchmarking framework to monitor and to report on whole-of-government activities was also brought out by highlighting the importance of measuring progress. Finally, the requirement to build a nuanced and multifaceted engagement strategy to gain and maintain popular support from the public and partners, which had been lacking for the KPRT, was emphasized.<sup>33</sup>

Not apparent in this narrative was the hard work necessary to make the whole-of-government construct work. These exertions occurred daily throughout the years of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. The friction produced by integrating dissimilar departments and organizations was very real, and operationalizing this integrated approach required the labor and good will of many public servants and military personnel. Also, critical to success was the strong leadership from the highest levels, embodied in the structure of the Afghanistan Task Force. Only in this way did the mission become, and remain, a whole-of-government effort.<sup>34</sup>

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32 DND, "3350-1 (JLLO)"; and Canada, "Kandahar Lessons Learned Workshop."

33 See Canada, Afghanistan Task Force, "Lessons Learned," 10.

34 Boudreau, email, May 19, 2019.

## Conclusion

Canadian efforts to build coordinated interdepartmental activities in Afghanistan evolved in conjunction with the growth of the NATO mission, national debate, and the end of the combat mission in 2011. This discussion and the record it generated is wide-ranging and contains much value from the strategic and tactical perspectives. Points of immediate importance for future whole-of-government practices can be derived from this collaboration. Of all this discussion, the need for more intragovernment contact, understanding, and collaboration prior to such missions is critical. This need was highlighted by Lieutenant-Colonel Kimberley Unterganschnigg, Canadian Armed Forces retired, who led the joint lessons-learned cell in Task Force Kandahar during 2010–11:

Interdepartmental civilian-military cooperation was essential to address the broad scope of security, governance, reconstruction, and development activities that were undertaken by the KPRT and TFK in the final year of Canada's involvement in Kandahar. Looking back, rather than a strategy document focused upon fixed signature projects, a more comprehensive framework and approach to the [whole-of-government] mission that provided clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each of the departments, particularly with respect to activities in support of governance and development, would have improved our effectiveness, as it would have guided consistent progress over the years.<sup>35</sup>

Although they have been identified as an essential element of mission success in documents from the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Afghanistan Task Force, integrated effects, nor concrete recommendations to facilitate whole-of-government understanding and outcomes, have yet to come to pass in a permanent manner. Even in 2009, prior to the lessons-learned exercises documented in this discussion, Canadian development specialist Andy Tamas argued the necessity of the creation of a “hybrid” organization consisting of “an integrated team of soldiers, development workers, diplomats and others who can protect themselves.”<sup>36</sup> This organization would be funded and resourced sufficiently to deploy quickly and to commence working effectively wherever required, regardless of security concerns to produce integrated effects. The ability to create, deploy, and sustain such a structure over the duration of the mission, along with established strategic planning and coordination mechanisms, would permit Canada to maintain the skills and relationships so arduously gained in Afghanistan.

Tamas's ideas support the KPRT and Afghanistan Task Force conclusions. Twenty-first century interventions require teams of people that are familiar with each other and their capabilities. In turn, this suggests establishing integrated professional development systems and increasing interdepartmental assignments to increase operating familiarity within the departments of the Canadian government. These steps, in conjunction with developing whole-of-government

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35 Unterganschnigg, “Canada's Whole of Government Mission,” 16.

36 Andy Tamas, *Warriors and Nation Builders: Development and the Military in Afghanistan* (Kingston: Canadian Defense Academy Press, 2009), 219.

organizations that contain a necessary cross-spectrum of skills and attributes and that can deploy quickly where ever needed, would increase Canada's pool of deployable capabilities. Sadly, none of the lessons-learned have been systemically operationalized in an enduring manner.

As the Canadian government looks toward future involvement in other fractured environments, it needs to heed the lessons identified from its contribution in southern Afghanistan, particularly over the last year of the combat mission. Canada must ensure the observations captured by the Afghanistan Task Force and the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, as well as the activities of Task Force Kandahar, are addressed to improve the effectiveness of its future whole-of-government activities. In order to create success in current operations, such as those in Iraq and Syria, as well as future interventions, the Canadian lessons identified over the course of the mission in Afghanistan must be operationalized, institutionalized, and sustained. Only in this fashion will lessons identified truly become lessons learned.