



Speech

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OUR LEADERSHIP ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN”**

Today I would like to talk to you about our mission in Afghanistan—the principles underpinning our efforts there, as well as the concrete achievements and progress made toward our objectives. As emotional an issue as this mission is for Canadians, we need to examine some facts and evidence for perspective and truth.

But first, let me say a few words about the foreign policy context in which the

mission in Afghanistan is situated.

In foreign policy, circumstances change and unforeseen events present new challenges that require flexible responses. But that doesn't mean we are flexible on our deeply held values.

Our new government wants to be judged by our actions, and not just by our words. We will bring greater focus to our activities and results, and make sure our policies and priorities serve clear Canadian interests and values.

Canadians want our country to have the capacity to help shape the international environment in ways that serve this country's interests. To do so requires that certain fundamental principles be followed.

First, our interests must be clear. If the issue does not engage Canadian values and principles, then why should we bother when there are so many other pressing demands on our time and resources?

It is important, therefore, to be clear about why we are interested and what we think should be done; otherwise, we're just spectators.

There is an old tried and true expression: "If you're going to talk the talk, you'd better be able to walk the walk." There are many other ways of saying the same thing, but it all boils down to the same principle. In international affairs, you have to pull your weight and pay your fair share of the freight, or as a predecessor of mine so rightly put it, and I'm paraphrasing, if you want to be at the table, you can't get up and go to the bathroom when the bill comes.

And finally, if you give your word, keep your word. When this government and this prime minister tell our friends and allies we're going to do something, we keep that word and we stand by it.

These are high standards, but they are worth pursuing, because this country deserves the international respect that honesty, integrity and effort bring in the world and we have earned it. Our safety, our security and our democracy depend on it.

On the basis of these standards, let me turn now specifically to our mission in Afghanistan and the principles that shape and direct Canada's efforts there.

We cannot ensure the security of Canada and Canadians without being engaged in distant lands and on difficult missions. That is why not just the Canadian Forces, but Canadian diplomats, development workers and experts in human rights, good governance, the rule of law and democracy building have all come together in common endeavour overseas to advance Canada's security. A whole different government approach is what is needed and is how we are proceeding.

No country is an island unto itself. No country can single-handedly turn the tide for the better in Afghanistan without the help of other member states of the United Nations sharing our readiness to step forward and defeat international terror at its source.

The international mission in Afghanistan does not stop at military intervention alone. The United Nations and the international community as a whole have the responsibility for securing, reconstructing and delivering basic services to Afghanistan and the Afghan people. There are over 60 countries in this effort.

This is not a “mission without end.” There are objectives and benchmarks by which we and others sharing the responsibility for Afghanistan’s security and reconstruction can measure progress and re-assess what needs to be done.

The New Government’s conviction is that helping to build democracy and good governance are part of the distinctive values that Canadian foreign policy bring to our leadership role in Afghanistan. Freedom, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights are the values that define our foreign policy.

We as a government have the indisputable responsibility to protect Canadians from the kind of terror we saw on September 11, 2001. That day, our continent was attacked—24 Canadians were among the more than 3,000 victims murdered in the Twin Towers of New York City.

The hijackers of those planes trained and plotted in Afghanistan. Their supporters still plot a return to power in Afghanistan because they would like to use it to stage more acts of terror and hatred against Western countries, including Canada. I need not remind you that Canada was on Bin Laden’s infamous list and that we are the only country yet to experience an attack on our soil.

Canada and our NATO allies have real fundamental national security interests in ensuring that Afghanistan never again returns to being a haven for global terrorists. That’s why Canada, alongside the United Nations, NATO and our other partners, gave its word to help Afghanistan—a promise Parliament democratically reaffirmed this spring.

Together, we have collectively committed to support Afghanistan’s democratically elected government as it works to gain its footing. Together, we have pledged to provide the requisite military forces to assist in the stabilization of the country, as the national Afghan security forces are not yet capable of doing so independently. And, we have promised to provide development assistance to help rebuild Afghanistan, including a recent announcement of support for the Afghan police, which includes basic equipment and training.

In assuming command of the multinational brigade headquarters in Kandahar

earlier this year, Canada paved the way for the transfer of operations to NATO command in the south this summer. Starting this week, the command in southern Afghanistan will be assumed by the Netherlands.

There are 37 countries contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force [ISAF]; 15 are in the south, including Canada's historical allies—the United Kingdom, Australia and the Netherlands—as well as newer partners with whom we are forging close ties, like Romania and Estonia.

Kandahar and southern Afghanistan is still the most dangerous region of the country. We are using NATO's consultative mechanisms to ensure that our allies are aware of the need for more troops for ISAF, other than Canadian, in this region.

I can assure you, we will continue to raise our concerns on this issue, as I did last week with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and a number of our allies directly.

The Secretary General agreed with Canada about the need for other NATO allies to step forward in sharing the military burden in southern Afghanistan.

We also spoke of the important development assistance work carried out there, with Canada leading by example. We recognized the essential contributions made by partners not present in the south, but agreed that it is important to concentrate military efforts where they are most needed—in the south.

No one country can do all that is necessary to provide the kind of secure environment needed for the other parts of this mission: reconstruction, development and good governance. They all happen under the umbrella of collective security.

As the Prime Minister pointed out to the UN General Assembly last month, Canada's mission in Afghanistan is part of an international effort sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council.

Sixteen UN agencies are on the ground. More recently, the UN expanded its network of regional offices, including in the south, with a view to ensure that those Afghans most in need receive the support they deserve.

As the Prime Minister underlined at the UN, we in Canada will do our part in Afghanistan. We expect others to do their part as well.

Sustainable progress means pursuing security, governance and development simultaneously.

A good example of this are the 23 provincial reconstruction teams [PRTs].

The PRTs integrate diplomats, development experts, police officers and military assets to address the causes of instability: poverty, poor governance, weak institutions, insurgency and regional warlords, and drug proliferation.

The Canadian-led PRT in Kandahar has personnel from National Defence, Foreign Affairs, CIDA, the RCMP and other Canadian police forces.

This is the new reality of peace-support operations. Peacekeeping has given way to peacemaking—Canada has modernized and adapted to this new reality. We are helping to build a country, foster economic growth and strengthen local governance, while providing security and confronting insurgents.

There is progress—measurable, concrete progress—thanks to these efforts.

The Bonn Agreement of 2001 outlined a series of benchmarks on establishing essential institutions of Afghan governance and society. They allow us to see more clearly the progress that's being made.

A constitution has been drafted. Nationwide elections—presidential, parliamentary and provincial—have been held.

These elections were remarkable both in the number of Afghans, and of Afghan women, participating and in the extraordinary support that was provided for them by the international community.

Over 26,000 polling stations were built in over 8,000 locations across Afghanistan. These were staffed by 160,000 Afghans, who helped the 12 million who registered to vote so that they could exercise their basic right to choose who will lead them. Women marked ballots for the first time in Afghan history.

Well over 6,000 Afghans, including 582 women, ran in the 2005 elections. And more than 25 percent of seats in Parliament were filled by women, which is more than in Canada—this in a country where, only a few short years ago, the Taliban executed women who dared to complain about their lot in life or had the audacity to voice an opinion politically.

The Bonn Agreement and recently the London Conference on the Afghanistan Compact also set out plans toward building other critical national institutions of governance.

Afghanistan has established a central bank and a single currency. The government has begun building and strengthening its own ministries. A national budget has been created. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has been established—a development unthinkable under the Taliban.

Many of these important steps toward freedom and democracy and good governance have been directly supported by Canada and Canadians working in the field.

The elections proved that the Afghan people have overwhelmingly chosen a new path for their country.

Canada helped them to do so through our military presence, ensuring a safe environment in which Afghans could exercise their right to vote.

Canada contributed more than \$33 million in support of the 2004 presidential election and 2005 parliamentary and provincial elections. Canadians sat on the Joint Electoral Management Board overseeing the entire electoral process.

Canadian diplomats participate daily in joint Afghan-international working groups to build the operations of the government in Kabul.

Canadians have helped form Afghan national security forces, police and military. I already mentioned the direct contributions to the national police.

Schools are being opened, roads are being built, wells are being dug, clinics are being established—all with Canadian help. These are things we are currently doing and will continue to do.

My colleague, CIDA Minister Josée Verner, visited Afghanistan last week to see first hand the progress that is being made. She detailed over \$50 million to help rebuild infrastructure and provide access to health care, clean water, sanitation, irrigation and education—the basic services people need most.

This money supports the National Solidarity Program, which oversees projects identified by the community. The funds are funnelled through the World Bank-administered national Reconstruction Trust Fund to ensure that the money goes where it should.

We have also contributed \$5 million to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in Kandahar, which aims to immunize over 7 million Afghan children.

Moreover, a further \$12 million is going to the Microfinance Investment Support Facility of Afghanistan, which has been very successful in getting consumer and micro-business loans to low-income people, particularly women. Nearly 200,000 people have benefited from this microfinance facility, and Canada is the lead donor.

This is progress. This is progress that did not exist five years ago and work that could not continue without a democratic Afghanistan standing on its own.

This is what we mean when we talk about an integrated Canadian effort to support Afghanistan's recovery. This is what we mean when we talk about real progress being made in getting Afghanistan started down the road to freedom and democracy.

Finally, I want to take a moment to discuss more broadly democracy and values in Canada's foreign policy. We commit ourselves to the promotion of democracy because our values demand it. That is an important reason but not the only reason.

We commit ourselves because promoting democracy is a fundamental part of building a more peaceful, secure and prosperous world.

But most significant to today's threats, the spread of democracy contributes directly to the security of Canadians.

The fact that terrorists fear and loathe democracy and will go to any lengths to try to destroy it should tell us something. It is that democracy is the key.

It is the key to freeing people, it is the key that empowers people to change their government.

Democracies empower those who are most directly affected by poverty, instability and conflict. They empower citizens within their own political systems to focus attention on problems, propose solutions and take responsibility for their own fate. By providing avenues for peaceful change, they reduce the appeal for more violent alternatives. They begin to address the resentment over disparity and the distribution of wealth.

That's why what Canada does in Afghanistan matters.

It matters to Canadians, as part of our efforts against global terrorism. It matters to the UN, to NATO and to our other partners in Afghanistan.

And most importantly, it matters very much to Afghans themselves in their efforts to embed democracy against those who preach and practise violence, degradation and oppression.

No one should be mistaken about Canada's military actions and those of our allies there. This is a tough and dangerous job.

Only the presence of the ISAF is, at this stage, strong enough to protect the respect of the rights—now enshrined in the Afghan Constitution—of women and girls to be educated, to earn a living, to live in security. The military presence is the thin line between quality of life and terror and death—we stand between progress

and sliding back into a breeding ground for terror and hatred.

There are some who think that now is the time to negotiate with the Taliban while we continue the reconstruction effort.

Do those who propose this think the insurgents believe in compromise and fair play, let alone a negotiated settlement? To underscore the folly and foolhardiness of this assertion, just this past weekend, Taliban leaders again ruled out talks with the Karzai government.

Yes, there is a reconciliation process in place for those willing to accept the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Some have availed themselves of the process. But the Taliban leadership shows no interest in participating in a peaceful and democratic country.

There are also those who think the Canadian Forces should withdraw from southern Afghanistan.

To them, I say this: Canada is in Kandahar to confront the insurgents, not avoid them. We can do a lot better by our soldiers on the front lines by dealing with realism, not wishful thinking.

Let us never forget: Canada and the other NATO allies are in Afghanistan at the invitation of the people of Afghanistan.

President Karzai noted this when he addressed our Parliament in September, calling Canada's role indispensable.

He said "Canada has made a tremendous difference in the lives of millions of Afghans already—your country is helping us on a daily basis."

Our engagement in Afghanistan demands flexibility and fortitude on the part of Canadians serving there. It also demands patience, steadfastness and support from Canadians here at home.

We are hugely proud of each and every Canadian who is there, on the ground, working on behalf of all Canadians.

Our word means something because we make good on our commitments. We are honouring this tradition in Afghanistan.

But let us be equally clear.

We are engaged in Afghanistan because it is in Canada's security interest to do so. We are shouldering our responsibilities there because of our responsibility to

protect and defend Canada and Canadians.

Canadians expect no less.

Thank you.