

by Steven Staples

A report commissioned by
The Council of Canadians
October 2006

MARCHING ORDERS

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Peacekeeping by the numbers

Number of Canadian military personnel on UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 1991: **1,149**

Number of Canadian military personnel on UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 2006: **56**

Number of military personnel (all nationalities) on UN peacekeeping missions as of August 31, 1991: **10,801**

Number of military personnel (all nationalities) on UN peacekeeping missions as of August 31, 2006: **66,786**

Number of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 1991: **11**

Number of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 2006: **16**

Cost of all current Canadian UN peacekeeping missions (2006-07): **\$6.2 million**

Cost of Canadian mission in Afghanistan (2006-07): **\$1.4 billion**

Cost of Canadian mission in Afghanistan to date (2001 to 2006-07): **\$5 billion**

Increase in military spending announced in 2005 by previous Liberal government: **\$12.8 billion over 5 years**

Increase in military spending announced in 2006 by current Conservative government: **\$5.3 billion on top of promised Liberal increases over 5 years**

Number of Canadian soldiers who have died on UN peacekeeping missions since 1990: **19**

Number of Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan since 2001: **42**

Percentage of Canadians who consider peacekeeping “a defining characteristic of Canada”: **69%** (October 25, 2005, Centre for Research and Information on Canada)

Percentage of Canadians who oppose sending troops to Afghanistan: **53%** (October 2006, The Strategic Counsel)

Percentage of Canadians who opposed extending the mission in Afghanistan by 2 years: **54%** (June 2006, Decima Research)

Percentage of Canadians who believe “Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan are dying for a cause we cannot win”: **59%** (October 2006, Decima Research)



From peacekeeping to war-fighting: Perception is reality

From Washington to Ottawa to Afghanistan, the refrain is the same: “Canada is a nation at war; peacekeeping is over.” Almost daily, generals, politicians and experts tell the Canadian public that the world is a dangerous place, and that our role on the world stage should be a military one. Increasingly, they say that UN peacekeeping is an outdated vocation for today’s Canadian Forces.

Is this true? Is the world more dangerous today than at any other recent time? Must Canada give up its cherished role as a peacekeeper and instead climb on board the U.S.-led “War on Terror”?

The perpetual beating of war drums in the Canadian political discussion could be mistaken for a military mission itself, or a “PSYOPS,” the military term for a psychological warfare mission – like dropping leaflets from airplanes to try to convince the enemy to surrender. The goal of this media-focused campaign would be to persuade the Canadian public to give up the notion of Canada as a peacekeeper, and accept new war-fighting missions under U.S. leadership.

It is no accident that Canada’s blunt-talking Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, delivers Canada-needs-to-get-tough lines to journalists in perfect, sound-bite rapid succession. The quotable general has been well trained to be a most effective advocate for building up the military to better fight terrorist “scumbags” around the world.

“We get public speaking training, how to present a lecture or treat a subject. We learn from past experiences,” he revealed to *Profit* magazine recently. “When I was in Afghanistan, we had people from the BBC come in to help us create the right perceptions, because perception is reality.”¹

General Hillier is on the front lines of a defence lobby intent on perpetuating the notion that the military is a war-fighting force and that peacekeeping is nothing but a quaint anachronism. Once the public accepts this perception, the vision of a new Canadian military will become a reality. Fuelled by billions of new dollars, thousands of new recruits, and state-of-the-art weapons, it would be ready to fight wars around the world – all in the service of the “War on Terror.”

Fanning out behind General Hillier is a legion of retired military brass, academic hawks and industry lobbyists who are organized into a public relations machine comprising a range of think tanks and university departments, frequently well funded by the Department of National Defence itself.²

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The war that Canada is currently fighting in Afghanistan is aimed not only at killing insurgents, but also at challenging the idea that our military's primary role should be that of peacekeeper.

General Hillier shares this vision of a new war-fighting Canadian military. Chosen to lead the Canadian Forces by Paul Martin's Liberals in January 2005, he has said that his goal is to transform the military into a force that has the funding, capability and political support to fight wars abroad alongside allies such as the United States.

"We're into a new era where instability and terrorists and militia forces are threats," he said last summer. "Global instability could cause some of these things to come home to roost in Canada, and I want the population to really understand that we are asking these young men and women to die."³

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While the defence of Canada has always been the primary purpose of the Canadian military, Canada faces so few military threats that the armed forces have been available for international peacekeeping missions.

General Hillier is using the dangerous mission in Kandahar – a mission that he personally sought out for Canada – to convince Canadians that we need a more powerful military to defend our country. Those who think as he does argue that the defence of our country relies on our ability to fight wars in other countries (the away game) before those threats can reach continental North America (the home game).

Following this line of thought, the defence of Canada requires co-operation with the U.S.-led war on terrorism, which is based on the idea that the best way to defend the American homeland is to invade someone else's homeland.

Transforming the military

The mission in Afghanistan has spanned three prime ministers: Liberals Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, and Conservative Stephen Harper. Chrétien accepted Canada's role in the original invasion and authorized the 2003 NATO mission in Kabul. Paul Martin's government shifted Canada's presence from Kabul to the southern and much more dangerous province of Kandahar until February 2007. Stephen Harper, after narrowly winning a non-binding vote in Parliament in May 2006, extended Canada's mission by two years, to February 2009.

Along with the mission to Afghanistan, the Liberal governments under both Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Prime Minister Paul Martin authorized and funded a new military "transformation", aimed at making Canada's military more suitable for the U.S. War on Terror. In fact, Paul Martin hand-picked General Hillier precisely to bring about these changes.

In announcing General Hillier's appointment as Chief of Defence Staff on January 14, 2005, the government trumpeted Hillier's experience, most notably his former role in commanding U.S. troops as an exchange officer with the U.S. Army, stating "Lt-Gen Hillier's leadership and experience will be invaluable as we move forward in this process to transform the Canadian Forces to meet the security challenges Canada faces. He has extensive experience serving in Canada, Europe, and the United States."⁴

The Liberal government provided General Hillier with the authority to reshape the military, and wrote him a virtual blank cheque for the largest military spending increase in a generation in the 2005 budget: \$12.8 billion over five years – an increase that will eventually take Canadian defence spending higher than any level since the Second World War.⁵

According to interviews conducted by the *Toronto Star*, the decision to ramp up Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan was made at a meeting on March 21, 2005, a few weeks after General Hillier's appointment. Prime Minister Paul Martin, his senior ministers and staff members were present to discuss the upcoming deployment of a 250-member Provincial Reconstruction Team to Kandahar – a mix of mostly military personnel along with development workers and diplomats who would carry out local reconstruction and training programs.

General Hillier arrived at the meeting with something much bigger in mind. He wanted to send a 1,000-strong battle group to Kandahar. The mission would change Canada's role at the time from conducting NATO peace support roles in the north, to a combat, counter-insurgency role in the south. Such a large combat role for Canada would impress the Americans, who had been suffering heavy losses, and wanted to rotate out 4,000 troops from Afghanistan for duty in Iraq.

Hillier had to convince the Martin government to take on the dangerous mission. According to the *Star*,

A number of people in the process were uncomfortable with the fact that to go south to Kandahar, Canada was going to have to step outside of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and once again sign up with the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

ISAF was truly multilateral, led by an international organization. Its mandate was to assist the Afghan government By contrast, Operation Enduring Freedom was an American-led, counter-terrorism mission, aimed at rooting out and killing the Taliban.⁶

There was concern about the cost in lives as well. Those fears would turn out to be well founded, since 28 soldiers died within six months of redeploying to Kandahar, in contrast to the eight deaths suffered in the entire preceding four years.

But General Hillier won the room by appealing to the Martin government's desire to be a global player, especially where it could assist the U.S. War on Terror.

Scott Reid, Martin's communications director, told the *Toronto Star* that it was the U.S. factor that won the day: "There was a fairly strong trail of orthodoxy [in the Foreign Affairs department] that was based on an evaluation of strategic interests in terms of our relationship with the United States. A lot of times policy was put to us based on, 'this matters to the White House.' And things that matter to the White House can't be taken lightly, because these guys take it personally So, we really have to evaluate the importance of making a decision that runs counter to the White House."⁷

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But what was really driving Hillier? And why was Martin so eager to push forward what the U.S. military has called a “transformation agenda”?

A few weeks before the March 2005 meeting, Martin had announced that Canada would not participate in the U.S. ballistic missile defence system. The Bush administration was still stinging from this decision, as well as Canada’s earlier stance against participating in the Iraq war.

An official who attended the meeting told the *Toronto Star* that “There was what you might call inevitability about the [Afghanistan] decision No one would ever call Hillier ‘arrogant,’ but some say another prevailing view emerged in the room: that if you couldn’t embrace the new and more dangerous world order you were just ‘naïve.’”⁸

Concern about the mission and the blurring of the line between NATO’s peace support role and the U.S.’s counter-insurgency role was a concern not just in Ottawa, but also at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the *Globe and Mail* in March 2006, “We’ll keep the [NATO] mission distinct from [the U.S.’s] Enduring Freedom. I do, we do, and the allies do consider this a NATO mission.”⁹

NATO members knew that the mission in the south would be dangerous and bloody. The alliance refused to take over command of the south until troops from Britain and the Netherlands had joined the Canadians. In those two countries, a debate raged about the role of British and Dutch forces, and whether victory was even possible. In the end, both countries decided to send troops to the south, but only after a thorough debate and vote in the Dutch Parliament. NATO took command of the south on August 1, 2006.

In interviews with the *Globe and Mail*, NATO officials were bemused by Canadian General Hillier’s seeming eagerness to take on the Kandahar mission. The *Globe* reported:

NATO officials pointed out that it was the Canadian military, under the leadership of General Rick Hillier, that insisted on sending troops to this most dangerous corner of Afghanistan.

Some NATO officials believe Gen. Hillier was attempting to overcome Canada’s weak military image in his decision to leave safer parts of Afghanistan to other members of the 30-nation coalition.¹⁰

General Hillier made some comments soon after taking on the role of Chief of Defence Staff that foreshadow the “get tough” attitude in his style of leadership and his perceptions of the military and the degree of threat faced by Canada.

In the wake of the London bombings by homegrown terrorists in July 2005, General Hillier declared the upcoming Afghan mission was needed because Canada had to “take a stand,” telling the *Globe and Mail*, “These are detestable murderers and scumbags We’re not going to let these radical murderers and killers rob from others and certainly we’re not going to let them rob from Canada.”¹¹

The *Globe and Mail* went on to observe that “[Hillier] stressed the new face of the Canadian Forces, which he said are now focused on the first job at hand: protecting Canadian interests at home and abroad. ‘We’re not the public service of Canada; we’re not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people.’”

That Canada was under no immediate, let alone long-term threat from the Taliban in Afghanistan seems not to have figured into the general’s reasoning.

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The Calgary School

David Bercuson, who heads the DND-funded Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary, has been supportive of General Hillier and his new approach to war-fighting.

Bercuson is wrongly presented as a middle-of-the-road commentator by media outlets. In reality he speaks for the hawks of the Canadian defence lobby. From his academic post at the University of Calgary, he disseminates his views, which are widely held to be almost identical to those of the current Conservative government. Just as the neo-conservatives at the University of Chicago, or “Chicago School,” have had a major influence on Republican Party policies, “the Calgary School” lends credence to the Conservative Party’s agenda.

In a recent column that is typical of his views, published in *Legion Magazine*, Bercuson berated Canadians for their increasing reluctance, as shown by several opinion polls, to support the military’s mission in Afghanistan. In an article titled “Canada’s Changing Role in Afghanistan,” Bercuson lets his cannons loose on the Liberals and the public in the wake of the January death by a suicide bomber of Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry:

It took the dramatic suicide bombing of Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry near Kandahar on Sunday, Jan.15, for many Canadians to finally awake to the death of Canadian peacekeeping

Canadians are not there to do peacekeeping, they do not wear blue United Nations helmets, they are not present to give two warring factions a chance to make peace

They are there to kill “bad guys” before the bad guys can kill them. And although the Liberal government tried to explain this to Canadians in the spring and summer of 2005, hardly anyone listened

The ISAF mission in Kabul was sold to Canadians as another form of peacekeeping, though the soldiers who went there knew full well that it was not

Canadians are now in the process of waking up to what soldiers do. Soldiers fight wars and prepare to fight wars – big wars, small wars, asymmetric wars, wars against terror, wars against tyranny. Soldier is not a synonym for peacekeeper. For all the long history of this country Canadians have gone into

harm's way for reasons of both national pride and national interests. They are doing it once again and the sooner the veil of national naïveté drops from Canadians' collective consciousness, the better. Once they know what the stakes are, and where Canadian pride and interests lie, Canadians will be far less inclined to cut and run.¹²

Today, the full cost of Canada's nearly five-year-long fight against the “scumbags and terrorists” is greater than \$5 billion, and rising. The human cost in lives is incalculable, but at the time of this writing, the death toll stands at 42 soldiers and one diplomat.

Canada's contribution to the U.S.-led War on Terror is being trumpeted loudly in Washington, D.C. Michael Wilson, Canada's new Ambassador to the United States (and former finance minister to prime minister Brian Mulroney), has been boasting of our military's role to American audiences this year: “Canada is an active contributor and partner in the war on terror, particularly with our activities in Afghanistan,” he told the D.C.-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.¹³

Not dissuaded by Canadian polls showing dropping support, he added, “in the words of our Prime Minister, [Canada] does not cut and run.”

To ensure the message of Canada's military role was known by Washington decision makers, the Canadian Embassy spent thousands of dollars to hang banners in the Washington subway system, especially at the stations nearest the Pentagon. The banners showed a photo of Canadian soldiers, and read, “Canadian Troops in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Boots on the Ground. U.S.-Canada Relations – Security Is Our Business.”

Enemies of peace, allies of war

The Embassy's slogan on those billboards is particularly revealing, because the government has never promoted to a Canadian audience a connection between the war effort in Afghanistan and a desire to build stronger ties with the U.S. However, this is exactly the message that the Canadian government wants American power elites to hear.

Traditionally, the government has encouraged the idea of Canada as a global peacekeeper. The image is used on currency and stamps, and is featured in a peacekeeping monument that was erected in Ottawa in 1992. The federal government recently designated August 9 as national Peacekeeping Day. Many Canadians see the military's involvement in peacekeeping as a source of national pride.

In fact, the accepted wisdom in Canada for many years was that without its image as a peacekeeper, the Canadian military would not have been able to bolster public support in the post-Cold War era. This seemed especially true in the wake of the terrible 1993 Somalia scandal (when soldiers tortured and killed Shidane Arone, a Somali boy).

In March 2001, the Department of National Defence convened a meeting with 65 defence experts to discuss the military's peacekeeping image and its effect on the Forces. A report on the meeting revealed the state of the debate:

