

“To rebuild a shattered nation, a failed state, and to make it functional again”

Why is Canada one of 35 countries in the NATO mission in Afghanistan? Omar Samad, Afghan Ambassador to Canada, offered some historical background, and some answers, in these extemporaneous remarks to an IRPP working lunch in Montreal. Five years after the galvanizing events of 9/11, he says, “we have a very young democracy that is trying to take root in Afghanistan.”

Pourquoi le Canada et 35 autres pays se trouvent-ils en Afghanistan ? Omar Samad, ambassadeur de l’Afghanistan au Canada, a proposé quelques réponses ainsi qu’un aperçu historique à l’occasion d’un déjeuner-causerie organisé par l’IRPP à Montréal, en décembre dernier. « On observe dans mon pays une toute jeune démocratie qui cherche à prendre racine », a-t-il déclaré, cinq ans après les terribles événements du 11 septembre.

Afghanistan in the past five years has obviously undergone tremendous change. We also face tremendous challenges in many, many areas, and you can appreciate as Canadians more so today some of those challenges than you did five years ago, because your people, your troops, your men and women, not only soldiers, but also aide workers, diplomats, have been and continue to be involved in Afghanistan, and in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. So as I said, much has changed, and this road map that was created in Bonn paved the way for a constitutional order in Afghanistan, an order that we did not have for many decades. And I have to tell you that every occasion that I have to speak to Canadians, I realize that giving a little bit of historical background about the last 30 years or so of Afghan history is very useful, even though some of you may already know it, or have studied it, or read about it, or heard about it. But from an

Afghan perspective I think I am going to try to convey what most Afghans think happened to them and their country in the last 25 years or so, which is a large part of my lifetime, and has affected, and continues to affect all Afghans...

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filled with the wrong elements again, which is exactly what happened in Afghanistan. By the early 1990s, the remnants of the Soviet regime fell and collapsed, and all of these various Afghan groups, some popular, some very unpopular, some radical, some moderate, but the radicals had the upper hand — they all converged on Kabul, the capital city, to grab power. And so for the next three or four years there was war over who would control Kabul. Again, the world is absent. The regional players are very much involved because they all have interests and they all are waging their war with Afghanistan, in the streets of Kabul. This is the early 1990s and the mid-1990s. In the mid-1990s all of a sudden we start hearing about this new group called the Taliban. And where did they come from? Now if you look at the history and the roots of the Taliban you will see that they all belonged to those radical extremist groups that had been given a haven in Pakistan, and had

been given the training and the equipment, and the arms and the money that came from the donors through the Pakistan military establishment. So by

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place two years ago for the presidency, the first time in our history, and the elections that took place last year for the Parliament and the provincial councils were all historic, given the backdrop of what happened in Afghanistan.

The fact that women were given their rights is a fact that we cannot ignore. That 5 million children are going back to school today is a fact that we cannot ignore. The fact that 4 million plus Afghans have returned to Afghanistan in the past five

years is a fact that we cannot ignore, even though they know that the conditions in Afghanistan are terrible. There is no electricity, there are no roads except for a few new ones, there is no drinking water except for a few places and there are thousands of problems after 25 years of destruction. But the world has been very generous; the world and your country have been extremely generous. Not only has the world pledged to help us with security and stability in the country because they now understand that the lack of stability and security in Afghanistan can be so detrimental to everyone. All they have to do is read the past 25 years of Afghan history and it will tell you in black and white what can happen again. And the reason why things can go wrong again is that

The events of 9/11 change that. Everybody is awakened, the focus is on Afghanistan, on the takeover of the country by terrorists, on the subjugation of its people by terrorists, and here we all are, trying to help to make up, in a way to make up for some of the past mistakes, and also to give hope to millions of Afghans. I think that the message after 9/11 is that we may have made mistakes, but we are back to help rebuild a shattered nation, a failed state, and to make it functional again.

the mid-1990s we have a new group. Now this new group not only has the support of its former backers, but also, by this time, has the support of tens of thousands of new militants, and some would call them terrorists, who had come from all over the Islamic world and other countries to join in the fight and to help the Taliban, who in turn hosted Osama Bin Laden. People like Bin Laden came to Afghanistan because they saw a radical extremist group like the Taliban were on the upswing, and they wanted to ride with them. And by 1996 they took Kabul, by 1998 they held 80 percent of Afghanistan, and there is a small resistance inside of the country that fights against them but they are, again, powerless and not supported by anyone.

This was the time, as you know, when Afghan women had to undergo the most oppressive experience that anyone can imagine. Girls were prohibited from going to school; even the boys' education under the Taliban wasn't anything to be proud of. Women were prohibited from working, draconian rules were imposed on our society and they destroyed our cultural heritage. They wanted to recreate Afghanistan in their own way by trying to get rid of 5,000 years of history. And again, Afghanistan was alone, and no one there to care about anything that was happening. But a void

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So this is where we stand today, five years later; we have accomplished a lot. We have a young, a very young democracy that is trying to take root in Afghanistan and the Afghan people have embraced it. I was in Afghanistan when we had several grand assemblies

So they say that Canada should only be doing peacekeeping. Yes, if it was a civil war and you had to send forces to separate two contending military armies, you would be doing peacekeeping. What kind of peacekeeping is going on in Afghanistan? What you are doing in Afghanistan is peace building, and peace enforcement, and sometimes this peace building has military components, and sometimes it has developmental components. And sometimes it has a component of building institutions, of building democracy, helping the women of the country, human rights, and so on.

of the people to discuss every single word of the new constitution; every single decision that had to be made in the past five years was done with popular consent. And so the elections that took

we didn't finish the job that we started after 9/11. We were able to dislodge the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but we were not able to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda they are still there. They fled to our bor-

ders and found refuge in other places. Our goal today is to try to prevent them from coming back to Afghanistan, and their goal is to come back to Afghanistan. And their goal is to prevent us from rebuilding Afghanistan and to prevent us from bringing stability and security to Afghanistan.

So if the question, if an open question to millions of people around the world, especially in those countries where you have to vote, [is] for being or not being in Afghanistan, for helping or not helping that country, there are all kinds of notions being floated around. I will just mention a few that I occasionally hear in Canada.

They say that this is a civil war. How could this be a civil war when a whole nation that is aspiring to a better life with more freedom, for dignity, for peace, is faced with a few thousand terrorists and extremists who want to take it back to another time. This is not civil war.

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So they say that this is a US war and we are following that particular struggle that the US has with perceived enemies. Okay, on 9/11 the US was attacked and we can go through the list of countries that have been targeted by al-Qaeda in the past 10 years, before 9/11. Do you remember Tanzania and Kenya, Istanbul, Morocco, Bali, London, so on and so forth? Let's forget about Afghanistan that was the major victim of terrorism for so many



IRPP, Montreal

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years. So, yes, the US has a huge role to play and the US continues to play a role in Afghanistan, but today it is NATO that is leading most of the military efforts.

They say that we are supporting warlords, and people who do not have the support of their people, that Afghans are against this so-called occupation. Well, yes, we have a problem

with some warlords, we had a problem with warlords in Afghanistan, but today if you ask the Afghan people in several surveys actually in the past few months, one by the BBC, ABC, recently showing the number one threat to Afghans, according to the Afghans are the Taliban. We used to have a warlord problem five, four years ago, but we have taken care of most of it, we have

disarmed and demobilized 60,000 former combatants, we have collected 90 percent of the heavy weapons that were in the hands of the private militia in the past five years, and we have reintegrated tens of thousands of for-

It is very important that at the end of the day, the Afghans take care of their own affairs, and that is our goal. So we can thank everyone and say we have all done a great job, and now we can take care of security in Afghanistan ourselves. We decided to rebuild our army, but this has to be a qualified, professional, well trained, well paid army. And we decided to rebuild our police force and our justice sector, and everything else that you can imagine that a society needs. Every institution that you can imagine has to be rebuilt in Afghanistan, and that is what makes this job so difficult.

mer militia men into civilian life. We still have some warlords who are a problem, but then we also have warlords who have become businessmen, who have become politicians, who are in our parliament and who support the democratic change.

Let me say a few words about Canada and Canada's role in Afghanistan. Some Canadians think that the Canadian role in Afghanistan has only existed since Kandahar. But I think that by now hopefully most Canadians understand that Canada has been involved and engaged in Afghanistan since October 7, 2001. You were part of the first wave that helped dislodge the Taliban, and you have been part of all the other waves, but the decision was made a couple of years ago by NATO to not only take over most of the military operations but also to move to different provinces of Afghanistan, and for some reason or another Canada ended up in Kandahar. The British ended up next to you. The Australians are somewhere close by, the Dutch are north of Kandahar, and NATO troops are in other parts of Afghanistan. And all of this is happening while we, the Afghans, are building up our own security institutions. It is very important that at the end of the day, the Afghans take care of their own

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We are doing fairly well with the army. We now have about 30,000 trained, deployed soldiers. Thousands of them are deployed in the south alongside your forces and we are doing a fairly good job with the police, but not good enough. We cannot do much better with the police; we need more training and better pay for the police, so that a Talib agent cannot come and buy the Afghan police for \$5 a day. That is exactly what happens. The Talib police are paid \$5 a day; the Afghan national police are paid \$1 a day. So we have a problem. The drug lord comes and offers \$6 a day, so you have another problem. So part of the issue and part of the solution in Afghanistan is economics, it is development. The infrastructure building is putting people to work and is showing the Afghans that the international community is not just there to help the security, but they are also there to really make a difference in people's lives. And Canada has been doing so,

and you have pledged a billion dollars from 2002 to 2011, roughly a hundred million dollars a year, which we appreciate very much. But we think that every dollar that comes from the taxpayers of this country or any other donor country has to be spent very wisely, and we think that we can do much better in spending these funds on the rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan.

Canadians ask, How long are we going to be in Afghanistan? I don't know, unfortunately I don't have an answer, I hope that it is not too long, but some benchmarks that I can tell you would make a difference in deciding how long the international community will be in Afghanistan have to do with institution building in Afghanistan, have to do with how well we do with our national army, how well we deal with our justice sector, how well we deal with delivering our services to the people with training new administrators and new managers, how well we do with fighting corruption, how well we deal with fighting the drug economy. And at the end of the hour how well we deal with terrorism.

They all go hand in hand; there is no one magic bullet to solve all these issues. And also let me remind you, and I have to also thank more than 35 nations who have contributed troops to Afghanistan today, because you are here in Afghanistan as a result of a United Nations mandated mission. And you are in Afghanistan as a result of a request made by the elected government of that country. So those of you who have an issue with the legitimacy of this mission, I would refer you to the UN, and I would refer you to the Afghan people.

Omar Samad is the Ambassador of Afghanistan to Canada. Excerpted from an IRRP working lunch in Montreal on December 11, 2006.