

Canada: Development Aid as a Counterinsurgency Tool

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TORONTO, Mar 23 (IPS) – A soon to be completed Canadian Forces counter-insurgency field manual foreshadows the type of interventions that the military in this country is preparing for the coming decades, according to a draft edition obtained by IPS.

Gone is the era of major military powers fighting tank battles or the aerial dogfights that defined warfare during the 20th century.

The new military environment is often urban-based warfare against fighters operating amid, and often with significant support from, local populations.

This type of insurgent warfare has marked the period since the end of the Cold War and has been underlined by attempts to control populations in so-called “failed states” operating without a central government, not the defeat of armies or the strict acquisition of territory.

Insurgencies are animated by “ideas for social change” and therefore the response necessarily “involves much more than simply military action,” the manual states.

“It is a multi-agency approach — military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions — that seeks to not only defeat the insurgents themselves, but the root causes of, and support for, the insurgency,” it says.

Increasingly, development aid is being used as a key weapon to advance the military’s counter-insurgency campaigns.

As the head of the army, Lt. Gen. Andrew Leslie, recently told journalists in Vancouver, the Canadian Forces work “hand in glove with the folks from the Canadian International Development Agency [as well as] reinforce the diplomatic activities and efforts of Foreign Affairs.”

In the language of the Department of Foreign Affairs, this integration is known as the “3-D approach” — defence, diplomacy and development acting together to further Canada’s “interests” in the world.

Canada has showcased this new foreign policy posture in Afghanistan, in what Member of

Parliament Michael Ignatieff called “a paradigm shift” and Canada’s top soldier, Rick Hillier, has described as “a glimpse of the future.”

In a comprehensive policy review tabled before Parliament in 2005, the Department of National Defence boasted that “the ability to respond to the challenge of failed and failing states will serve as a benchmark for the Canadian Forces.”

Counter-insurgency is by no means new and the lessons of history’s irregular wars — the United States in Vietnam, the British in the Malay, Canada’s Northwest Rebellion — are as relevant as ever. Yet, according to the manual’s lead author, this is the first time that Canada has formally drafted a counter-insurgency field manual for training its soldiers and officers.

In an interview with IPS, Maj. D.J. Lambert, director for army doctrine, described the manual’s focus on a “comprehensive approach”.

In order to effectively defeat the local uprisings, “the military is working hand in hand with other agencies, with a unifying theme and a unity of purpose and, ideally, effort,” Lambert said.

The most recent report by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) on plans and priorities declares that the agency “will set core policy directions for Canadian development assistance in a manner that is consistent with Canada’s foreign policy.”

CIDA identifies three “countries of strategic importance for Canada” — Afghanistan, Haiti and Iraq. In each instance, Canada is among the top-five donor countries. Each of the three priority countries is experiencing deepening crises of human security, foreign occupations, and — particularly in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan — growing insurgencies.

A significant portion of CIDA’s funding in each of these countries is earmarked for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to assist in training police cadets.

The RCMP’s director general of international policing, David Beer, testified before a Parliamentary committee late last year that more than 34,700 Iraqi police were trained under the Canada-backed training programme in neighbouring Jordan.

Beer added that “approximately 10 percent” of the recruits trained by Canada have been killed in service in Iraq.

The security apparatus in all three countries has been roundly criticised by human rights groups for widespread abuses.

After having received virtually zero Canadian aid during the 1990s, Afghanistan has, since Sep. 11, 2001, become Canada’s largest recipient of development money.

According to CIDA, by the end of the current fiscal year (2006–2007), “Canada will have invested nearly 600 million dollars [517,482,000 U.S. dollars] since the fall of the Taliban”. Over a 10-year period beginning in 2001, Canada will have committed nearly 862 million U.S. dollars in development aid to Afghanistan.

While only a fraction of the military spending, Canada’s aid contribution to Afghanistan

represents a significant element of CIDA's 2.5-billion-dollar annual budget.

Canadian Forces have administered dozens of aid projects with CIDA throughout Afghanistan under the auspices of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. The PRTs are units comprised of soldiers, aid workers and civilian contractors.

"The PRT's are very much a realisation of good counter-insurgency principles, with cooperation and shared intent across the different agencies," said Lambert in a telephone interview.

The PRT-model was first developed by the U.S. under Operation Enduring Freedom in late 2002. It has since been extended across Afghanistan, and was recently applied as a model for the George W. Bush administration's 20,000-troop "surge" in Iraq. The Bush administration has referred to the Iraq PRT's as "powerful tools in achieving our counterinsurgency strategy."

As Canada's draft manual notes: "It is unlikely that the conflict will be suddenly ended with a major military victory against the insurgents." Instead, "typical measures of effectiveness are numbers of violent incidents and the level of popular support for the government."

By all accounts, those benchmarks continue to deteriorate in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A widely cited U.S. intelligence report about Afghanistan released in early 2007 showed a spike in suicide attacks from 27 in 2005 to 139 in 2006. Roadside bomb attacks more than doubled from 783 to 1,677, and direct attacks using small arms and grenades increased almost threefold to 4,542 from 1,558.

A report this week by the Senlis Council found that support for the Taliban has "rocketed" in the last year and half, while 80 percent of respondents in southern and eastern Afghanistan — the heart of NATO's counter-insurgency fight — expressed worry about feeding their families.

This story is part two of a two-part series on the transformation of Canada's military and humanitarian missions

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