

Canada in Afghanistan: Top Ten Under-reported Facts

By [Media Alliance for New Activism](#)

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Region: [Canada, Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

Canadian mainstream media has been promoting our role in Afghanistan, with almost no critical voices, despite polling that indicates between 48% to 62% of Canadians not only question but oppose our engagement of troops in this war-torn country (Ipsos-Reid, Mar. 4/06; Strategic Counsel/Globe and Mail, Feb. 24/06).

The 'post-Harper trip' polling results have been misrepresented because Strategic Counsel found that, while views had shifted due to a heightened campaign by the military and the media, 69% want a "debate to decide if our troops should stay in Afghanistan beyond next year" and 70% base their support on the misconception that our purpose is significantly more "peacekeeping than combat." In fact, the new polling finds that "52 per cent of Canadians say they are against a 10-year mission" (Globe and Mail, Mar. 14/06).

HERE ARE TEN VERIFIABLE FACTS THE MEDIA HAS AVOIDED

Brief Overview:

FACT #1: Jean Chretien & Canadian Corporations Involved in Trans-Afghan Pipeline

FACT #2: Gordon O'Connor, Defence Minister, Is Former Military Lobbyist

FACT #3: Current Afghan Parliament Includes Warlords and Drug Lords

FACT #4: Afghan Warlords Considered Bigger Threat Than Taliban

FACT #5: Afghan Women Face Repression Despite Removal Of Taliban

FACT #6: Elected Afghan Woman Faces Death Threats For Speaking Out

FACT #7: Since the U.S.-led War, Afghanistan Is Increasingly Hooked on Heroin

FACT #8: U.S. And Coalition Forces Using Excessive Force & Arbitrary Detention

FACT #9: Canada Complicit In Violation of Human Rights For 'War On Terror'

FACT #10: U.S. Finds More Oil and Gas Reserves After 4-Year Search

FACT #1: FORMER PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRETIEN AND CANADIAN CORPORATIONS INVOLVED IN NATURAL GAS PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AFGHANISTAN, IN COOPERATION WITH REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT

In 2002:

"An agreement has been signed in the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat, paving the way for construction of a gas pipeline from the Central Asian republic through Afghanistan to Pakistan. The building of the trans-Afghanistan pipeline has been under discussion for some years but plans have been held up by Afghanistan's unstable political situation. ... With improved regional security after the fall of the Taleban [sic] about a year ago, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan have decided to push ahead with plans for the ambitious 1,500-

kilometre-long gas pipeline.”

— BBC News, Dec. 27, 2002

[Available here.](#)

And in 2004:

“Jean Chretien is advisor to the Bennett Jones, a Calgary-based law firm specializing in energy issues. He is also consul in another law firm Heenan Blaikie. In addition, Chretien is international relations advisor to PetroKazakhstan Inc., an energy firm based in Calgary with major interests in Kazakhstan and Caspian.”

— News Central Asia, Sept. 4, 2004

[Available here.](#)

“During a meeting Friday [September 3, 2004] in Ashgabat, President Niyazov invited Oman and Canada to participate in oil and gas projects in Turkmenistan. He identified construction of Trans-Afghan Pipeline (TAP) and modernization of Seyidi refinery as two likely projects where Omani and Canadian firms could take part. A joint Omani-Canadian delegation including Yusuf bin Alavi, foreign minister of Oman and Jean Chretien, former prime minister of Canada, called on Niyazov to discuss cooperation in the energy and hydrocarbon sectors. ... [The Trans-Afghan Pipeline] would transport Turkmen natural gas to Pakistan through Afghanistan.”

— News Central Asia, Sept. 4, 2004

[Available here.](#)

“Headed by president-for-life Saparmurat Niazov [sic], Turkmenistan remains one of the most repressive and closed countries in the world. Regressive government policies in education, culture, and health care caused increasing concern in the international community. ... [T]he overall human rights situation in Turkmenistan remains dismal.”

— Human Rights Watch, Jan. 18, 2006

[Available here.](#)

More on Chretien, Canadian Corporations, and the Caspian: [Here](#) and [here](#).

FACT #2: CANADA’S DEFENCE MINISTER, GORDON O’CONNOR, IS A FORMER LOBBYIST FOR MILITARY CONTRACTORS

“The new defence minister is a retired general who once lobbied government on behalf of some big military contractors, a background which some find troubling. ... He went into business and in the 1990s became a senior associate at Hill and Knowlton, one of the world’s largest public affairs firms. Up until February 2004 – when he left the firm to run in the June election – he was a registered lobbyist. He represented defence contractors such as Airbus Military, United Defense, General Dynamics Canada and BAE Systems as well as a variety of other, non-military clients.”

— Canadian Press, Feb. 5, 2006

[Available here.](#)

On General Dynamics:

“On September 1, 2005, [Defense Industry Daily] noted that General Dynamics had just become a second-source prime for small-caliber ammunition to the US military, as a result of the Army’s small-caliber ammunition shortage. ... That award may be having ripple effects now, as General Dynamics has just entered a definitive agreement to acquire Canadian ammunition system integrator SNC Technologies Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary

of SNC-Lavalin Group Inc., for approximately \$275 million (CDN\$ 315 million). SNC Technologies supplies small, medium, and large-caliber ammunition and related products to armed forces and law enforcement agencies in North America. Products include its Simunition line, and customers include Canada and the U.S. Defense Department.... The company generated USD\$ 293 million in revenue in 2005, with EBITDA of approximately USD\$ 39.5 million.”

— Defense Industry Daily, Feb. 27, 2006

[Available here.](#)

On BAE Systems:

“BAE Systems Land & Armaments in York, PA has received a delivery order amount of \$187.3 million as part of a \$227.3 million firm-fixed-price contract for repair of desert damaged vehicles. [Defense Industry Daily] has discussed the maintenance overhang facing US equipment as a result of use in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this is one small piece of that. Relevant systems manufactured by BAE Systems include M2/M3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles and the derivative M270 MLRS rocket artillery vehicles; M113 Armored Personnel Carriers, M88 Hercules armored recovery vehicles, M019 self-propelled howitzers, and the US Marines’ AAV7 Amtracs amphibious armored vehicles.”

— Defense Industry Daily, Mar. 14, 2006

[Available here.](#)

On the record:

“Having worked in an industry in the past does not constitute a conflict of interest in the present.”

—Prime Minister Steven Harper; Canadian Press, Feb. 5, 2006

[Available here.](#)

FACT #3: CURRENT AFGHAN PARLIAMENT (ELECTED SEPTEMBER 2005) INCLUDES WARLORDS AND DRUG LORDS

“Human Rights Watch estimates that 60 percent of the new legislators have links to warlords. The New York-based rights group singled out Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a powerful militia commander whose guns ravaged Kabul residents in the 1990s, and Mohammed Fahim, a former defense minister, who has been accused of war crimes. ... A European diplomat, who asked not to be named, reckoned that about 20 legislators still have active private militias and that at least 20 more have been involved in drug smuggling.”

— San Francisco Chronicle, Dec. 19, 2005

[Available here.](#)

U.S. President George W. Bush’s official White House response to the elected Parliament:

“I congratulate the Afghan people and Afghan Government for today’s successful parliamentary elections, which are a major step forward in Afghanistan’s development as a democratic state governed by the rule of law.”

— Office of the Press Secretary, Sept. 18, 2005

[Available here.](#)

Commenting on the elections, Mark Schneider, Senior Vice President of International Crisis Group, had stated:

“It’s not merely about drug money financing candidates. Drug lords are candidates.”

— Boston Globe, Oct. 20/04

[Archived here.](#)

“Abdul Karim Brahowie, Afghanistan’s minister of tribal and frontier affairs, says that the government has become so full of drug smugglers that cabinet meetings have become a farce. ‘Sometimes the people who complain the loudest about theft are thieves themselves,’ he says.”

— Christian Science Monitor, May 13, 2005

[Available here.](#)

Canada’s role in the Elections:

“... Canada will contribute through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) an additional \$5 million to support Afghanistan’s [2005] parliamentary elections. This increase brings the total amount of CIDA funding for the election to \$13 million.”

— Canadian International Development Agency, Sept. 14, 2005

[Available here.](#)

FACT #4: AFGHAN WARLORDS CONSIDERED A BIGGER THREAT TO AFGHANISTAN’S SECURITY THAN THE TALIBAN

“The warlords and private militias who were once regarded as the west’s staunchest allies in Afghanistan are now a greater threat to the country’s security than the Taliban, according to the interim president, Hamid Karzai.”

The Guardian, July 13, 2004

[Available here.](#)

FACT #5: AFGHAN WOMEN FACING OPEN REPRESSION DESPITE THE SUPPOSED REMOVAL OF THE TALIBAN AND PRESENCE OF FOREIGN TROOPS

“An Afghan province has banned women from performing on television and radio, declaring female entertainers un-Islamic, a provincial official said on Saturday. The ban in Nangahar, a southeastern province heavily patrolled by U.S.-led troops hunting for Islamic militants, took effect from Friday and also covers women presenters of news and other information, the official said.”

— Reuters, Apr. 17, 2004

[Archived here.](#)

“Afghan farmers prevented from growing poppies under a British-led eradication programme have been forced to hand over their daughters to drug traffickers to settle their debts, according to reports from Afghanistan. The claim is the latest in a series to dog the British effort to curb Afghanistan’s opium industry. Opium dominates Afghanistan’s economy, accounting for 60 per cent of its income. Critics say the country is turning into a narco-state under the noses of NATO peacekeeping forces, and of the Western governments involved in reconstruction.”

— The Independent (London), Oct. 3, 2005

[Archived here.](#)

Amnesty International states in 2005:

“Violence against women and girls in Afghanistan is pervasive; few women are exempt from the reality or threat of violence. Afghan women and girls live with the risk of: abduction and rape by armed individuals; forced marriage; being traded for settling disputes and debts; and face daily discrimination from all segments of society as well as by state officials. Strict

societal codes, invoked in the name of tradition and religion, are used as justification for denying women the ability to enjoy their fundamental rights, and have led to the imprisonment of some women, and even to killings. Should they protest by running away, the authorities may imprison them.”

— Afghanistan: Women still under attack – a systematic failure to protect, May 30, 2005

[Available here.](#)

FACT #6: ELECTED AFGHAN WOMAN FACES ONGOING DEATH THREATS FOR SPEAKING OUT AGAINST WARLORDS AND DRUG LORDS IN CURRENT GOVERNMENT

“As a new parliament opens in the Afghan capital, ... all eyes are on Malalai Joya, a 27-year-old woman, who has emerged as a fearless critic of the warlords that control the country. In 2003, Joya, then a women’s literacy and health worker, had stood up at a public meeting to discuss the new constitution and denounced the factional leaders as ‘criminals’ who should be taken to the world court. Her speech earned her powerful enemies. Despite her immense popularity, which led to her winning the September election from the border province of Farah on her own steam, she rarely travels alone. She employs at least 12 security guards — there have been at least four assassination attempts — and is always seen in public wearing a burqa (veil that covers the body and face from head to toe).”

— Inter Press Service News Agency, Dec. 18, 2005

[Available here.](#)

“Women’s activist turned politician Malalai Joya ... picked up where she left off two years ago, condemning Afghanistan’s warlords, some of who now sit with her in the Parliament that convened Monday after three decades. ‘I can see them sitting here in this House,’ said Joya, who earned an international reputation when she spoke against warlords and drug smugglers in the Loya Jirga national meeting to discuss the country’s constitution in late 2003.”

— Inter Press Service News Agency/Pajhwok Afghan News, Dec. 20, 2005

[Available here.](#)

For more information:

[BBC News: “Afghan rights advocate expects death”](#)

[Defense Committee for Malalai Joya](#)

FACT #7: SINCE THE U.S.-LED WAR BEGAN, AFGHANISTAN HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DEPENDENT ON OPIUM POPPIES AND HEROIN FOR ITS ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

“The hardline Taliban regime, which ruled Afghanistan until 2001, greatly reduced opium poppy cultivation. However, under the rule of the new democratically elected president, Hamid Karzai, opium production is approaching record highs, with poppies now being grown in all of Afghanistan’s 32 provinces.”

— CBC News, Nov. 18, 2004

[Available here.](#)

“Afghanistan has re-emerged since the U.S.-led war as the world’s leading source country for opium and heroin — rapidly returning to levels of the 1990s, when it produced about 70 percent of the world’s illicit opium supply, a U.N. report says. ... The U.N. report, issued Friday, said a half-million people are involved in Afghanistan’s trafficking chain and estimated an annual income at \$25 billion, despite a ban on opium production put in place

by Afghan President Hamid Karzai.”
— The Washington Times, Aug. 11, 2003
[Available here.](#)

“The United Nations estimated that 323,700 acres in Afghanistan were dedicated to opium last year [2004]. That marks a 64 percent increase over the figure for 2003. The U.S. government’s estimate was even higher: 5.1 million acres, a 239 percent increase over its 2003 figure. The United Nations says Afghanistan produced nearly 90 percent of the world’s opium and the drug accounted for more than 60 percent of the country’s gross domestic product.”

— Associate Press / MSNBC.com, Jan. 25, 2005
[Available here.](#)

“To call Afghanistan a third world country exaggerates its wealth. A stunning 70% of its people are undernourished: in a typical developing country this is 25%. Infant mortality is almost twice the third world average. Today, some two million Afghans rely on opium poppies for their livelihood, generating \$2.7bn of illegal wealth. They will not give this up readily, nor will the farmers whose desire to feed their families is stronger than their desire to placate NATO.”

— The Scotsman (Scotland’s National Newspaper), Jan. 29, 2006
[Available here.](#)

“‘There is a danger that all the stabilization and reconstruction efforts will be neutralized unless the narco trafficking problem is addressed,’ says Ursula Müller, political counselor at the German Embassy in Washington. ‘We have to fight this corruption ... those guys involved in the drug business [who] are in all levels of Afghanistan’s government,’ adds Ms. Müller, who has been actively involved in rebuilding Afghanistan since the US toppled the Taliban in late 2001. ... But the opium trade is deeply rooted in Afghan society. Many regional warlords and opponents of the Taliban are now top officials in the Karzai government. One of the most complicated – and delicate – tasks is to get corrupt officials to turn away from the drug trade as a source of personal income.”

— Christian Science Monitor, May 13, 2005
[Available here.](#)

FACT #8: U.S. AND COALITION FORCES ARE USING EXCESSIVE FORCE AND ARBITRARY DETENTION IN AFGHANISTAN

U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, which recommended “additional troops” in Afghanistan in July 2003, admits the following about conditions in 2005: “U.S. and coalition forces active in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom since November 2001, continue to arbitrarily detain civilians and use excessive force during arrests of non-combatants. Ordinary civilians arrested in military operations are unable to challenge the legal basis for their detention or obtain hearings before an adjudicative body. They have no access to legal counsel. Generally, the United States does not comply with legal standards applicable to its operations in Afghanistan, including the Geneva Conventions and other applicable standards of international human rights law. At least six detainees in U.S. custody in Afghanistan have been killed since 2002. U.S. Department of Defense documents show that five of the six deaths were homicides.”

— Human Rights Watch World Report 2006, p. 226
[Available here](#)

“From 2002 to [2004], Human Rights Watch estimates that at least one thousand Afghans and other nationals have been arrested and detained by U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. ... There are numerous reports that U.S. forces have used excessive or indiscriminate force when conducting arrests in residential areas in Afghanistan. As shown in this report, U.S. military forces have repeatedly used deadly force from helicopter gunships and small and heavy arms fire, including undirected suppressing fire, during what are essentially law-enforcement operations to arrest persons in uncontested locales. The use of these tactics has resulted in avoidable civilian deaths and injuries, and in individual cases may amount to violations of international humanitarian law. Human Rights Watch has also documented that Afghan soldiers deployed alongside U.S. forces have beaten and otherwise mistreated people during arrest operations and looted homes or seized the land of those being detained.”

— Human Rights Watch Report, Mar. 8, 2004

[Available here](#)

Recent Examples:

“In early May 2005, sixteen [Afghan] protesters were killed by police and army troops during violent demonstrations in several cities in response to reports of U.S. interrogators desecrating a copy of the Koran during interrogations at Guantanamo Bay.”

— Human Rights Watch World Report 2006, p. 220

[Available here.](#)

“A US air raid in Afghanistan’s rugged eastern mountains killed 17 civilians, including women and children, an Afghan official said yesterday. The US military confirmed civilian deaths but said the numbers were unclear.”

— The Toronto Star / Associated Press, July 5, 2005

[Available here.](#)

FACT #9: CANADA COMPLICIT IN THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE ‘WAR ON TERROR’

“U.S. partners such as Britain and Canada compounded the lack of human rights leadership by trying to undermine critical international protections. Britain sought to send suspects to governments likely to torture them based on meaningless assurances of good treatment. Canada sought to dilute a new treaty outlawing enforced disappearances.”

— Human Rights Watch, Press Release, Jan. 18, 2006

[Available here.](#)

FACT #10: U.S. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY SPENT NEARLY FOUR YEARS ASSESSING AFGHANISTAN’S OIL AND GAS RESERVES AND FOUND MORE THAN EXPECTED IN 2006

“Two geological basins in northern Afghanistan hold 18 times the oil and triple the natural gas resources previously thought, scientists said Tuesday as part of a U.S. assessment aimed at enticing energy development in the war-torn country. Nearly 1.6 billion barrels of oil, mostly in the Afghan-Tajik Basin, and about 15.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, mainly in the Amu Darya Basin, could be tapped, said the U.S. Geological Survey and Afghanistan’s Ministry of Mines and Industry. ... The \$2-million US assessment, paid for by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, was nearly four years in the making, said Daniel Stein, the agency’s regional director for Europe and Eurasia. The total area assessed was only about one-sixth of the two basins’ 518,000 square kilometres that lie within Afghanistan.”

— Associated Press, March 14, 2006

[Available here.](#)

A NEED FOR INDEPENDENT FACTS AND MEDIA

This e-mail was originally inspired by the fact that the Toronto Star, one of Canada's largest, most respected, and 'liberal' newspapers, has decided to only have one external link from its 'Special Report' section on Afghanistan – to the Department of National Defence. When the mainstream media only provide government information and rely on government links and officials for the whole story, they are no longer objective, independent, or critical. That is why the public must respond with facts and action.

Produced by members of the Media Alliance for New Activism (MANA), a pan-Canadian network of over 50 independent media groups. On the web: IndependentMedia.ca

IF YOU WISH TO ACT:

Please forward this message to friends, family, concerned citizens, groups and media contacts.

Those critical of our role in Afghanistan, and those dedicated to non-military solutions to global conflict, will be making their voice collectively heard on March 18th, 2006 – the 3rd anniversary of the bombing and invasion of Iraq.

For more details on public actions in your community or neighborhood, please contact: [Canadian Peace Alliance / L'Alliance Canadienne Pour La Paix](#)

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