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War in Afghanistan to cost Government \$20.7 billion, UN Peacekeeping abandoned: Rideau Institute Report

OTTAWA, Oct. 8 /CNW Telbec/ - The Rideau Institute released a report today that examines the full cost of Canada's war in Afghanistan, raising important new questions about the government's ability to afford the mission with an economic recession looming, and highlighting the corresponding abandonment of Canadian participation in UN peacekeeping efforts.

The war will cost the government of Canada \$20.7 billion by 2011. In addition, the loss to the Canadian economy from wounded or killed soldiers will be \$7.6 billion, making the total cost of the war to the government and the economy more than \$28 billion.

"It's clear that the government's budgetary and foreign policy hands will be tied if it intends to keep our troops in Afghanistan through December 2011," said co-author Steven Staples, President of the Rideau Institute. "The cost of the war in Afghanistan has essentially resulted in the abandonment of Canada's 50-year commitment to UN peacekeeping," said Staples.

The report entitled "The Cost of the War and the End of Peacekeeping: The Impact of Extending the Afghanistan Mission" details the financial costs to the government of equipment, salaries, health care costs for military personnel, disability and death payments for casualties, humanitarian aid, as well as the private costs of killed and injured soldiers which are born by them, their families and communities.

In March of this year, the government extended Canada's mission in Afghanistan beyond its current end date of February 2009 to December 2011 without serious estimation of the financial cost of such a decision. The costs calculated in this report are based on the fact the extension of the mission will resemble the size and scope of the military mission that has been conducted since February 2006.

"Since the Afghanistan mission began and costs for the war continued to rise, the Department of National Defence has reduced Canada's UN peacekeeping contributions by 83%, from \$94.1 million in 2000-01 to an estimated \$15.6 million in 2008-09," said report co-author David Macdonald, an economist and President of Embryonic. "In July 2008, total Canadian personnel contributions to U.N. operations were a mere 167 (including soldiers and police), ranking Canada 53rd of 119 contributing nations, next to Slovakia at 52nd and Malawi at 54th."

A September 22, 2008 poll conducted by Nanos Research for the Rideau Institute revealed a high degree of public anxiety with Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party's 20-year, \$490 billion Canada First defence strategy, with 51.8% of Canadians supporting a reduction in this planned spending, while 27% of Canadians wanting to see the plan continue as proposed. "Even among Conservative voters, 40% wanted reductions, while 35.6% wanted the plan to continue," said Staples.

Download the report at <http://www.rideauinstitute.ca>

The Rideau Institute on International Affairs is an independent research, advocacy and consulting group based in Ottawa. It provides research, analysis and commentary on public policy issues to decision makers, opinion leaders and the public. It is a federally registered non-profit organization, established in January 2007.