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Afghanistan debate rages on for Canada

LAURA EGGERTSON FOR METRO CANADA

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As Canada marked the tragic milestone of 100 soldiers killed in Afghanistan, voices across the country debate the rising costs, both human and economic, of a war that rivals the Second World War in length.

In October 2001, Canada joined the U.S.-led War on Terrorism by launching Operation Apollo, in response to the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. To date, more than 20,000 Canadian Forces personnel have served in Afghanistan's shifting sands, with some soldiers on their second or third tours of duty.

Canada has lost 100 soldiers, diplomat Glyn Berry, and aid workers Shirley Case and Jacqueline Kirk. Close to 300 other soldiers have been wounded in action, some losing limbs to incendiary explosive devices.



RYAN TAPLIN/FOR METRO CANADA FILE PHOTO

Cpl. Kris Evong from Porters Lake, N.S., is hugged by his wife, Kelly, as he kisses his son Gage, 2, as he prepares to deploy to Afghanistan in January 2007. Evong was one of about 120 soldiers who shipped out as part of Joint Task Force Afghanistan Rotation 3.

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"From an army as small as Canada's ... that's a lot of people," says Martin Shadwick, a defence analyst at Toronto's York University. "That's a considerable investment that has been made in life and limb, and certainly in national human treasure – and in money."

By comparison, there have been

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approximately 500 U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan, where about 36,000 American troops have been deployed.

As of March 31, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Canada has spent more than \$7 billion on the war, including the cost of salaries, food and equipment for the troops. Those figures are based on the Defence Department's own budgetary Estimates to Parliament.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has said that Canada is protecting Canadian interests, by stabilizing Afghanistan to strengthen international security.

In an October 2007 speech, he listed Canada's goals as stabilizing the country, establishing capable Afghan security forces under the legitimate control of the government of Afghanistan, and creating the conditions to allow

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Currently serving: 2,500 Canadian Forces personnel in Afghanistan, serving as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

Past service: Close to 20,000 CF personnel have served in Afghanistan.

Canadian deaths: 100 soldiers
Diplomats killed: Glyn Berry, as a result of a car bomb Jan.



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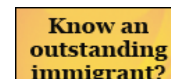
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governance and development to occur.

He assured Canadians that Canada is nearing those goals.

Outside of Kandahar city, however, where NATO forces are based, Brig.-Gen. Denis Thompson told reporters in August that the Afghanistan Task Force he leads does not have enough soldiers or policemen to secure even the remainder of the Kandahar province. The security situation is impeding development.

Those opposed to the war question whether Canada is meeting its own definitions of success.

"All of the arguments that we were told – restoring democracy, defending women's rights – none of these things have happened," says James Clark of the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War, a member of the Canadian Peace Alliance.

"The composition of the Afghan government is mainly made up of warlords and drug lords who have atrocious human rights records," Clark says. "They have their own private militias which operate with NATO forces and are also involved in opium production."

But other organizations, including the Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, insist Canadians are making a difference.

"Yes, it is worth it," says Janis Rapchuk, a board member of the Calgary-based organization. She cites the increasing number of children in schools, and women taking human rights, literacy, computer and teachers' training.

World Vision Canada, which has been working in Afghanistan since the Taliban government was defeated in 2001, says the increased fighting and the Taliban's resurgence has made its work even in the more secure northwest of Afghanistan increasingly difficult.

But the lives of Afghan people have improved, if not to the extent they'd like, says Emmanuel Isch, vice-president of international programs for World Vision Canada.

Pollsters say Canadians continue to be divided about Canada's presence in Afghanistan, with a slight majority favouring withdrawal if the Canadian casualty count grows. The intensity of those positions will likely deepen with further casualties, says Nik Nanos, president of Ottawa-based Nanos Research.

Andria Hill-Lehr's son served in Afghanistan from December 2006 to the end of June 2007. Although she supported her son and supports the troops, she believes Canada should withdraw.

"I'm not the only one that has said, for a long time, support the troops, but that doesn't mean supporting the government," says Hill-Lehr, author of *A Mother's Road to Kandahar*.

In the end, the signs of optimism and of pessimism in Afghanistan may all be valid, says Shadwick. "It could be that all of those different perspectives might, at any one time, be right," he says.

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15, 2006, when he was travelling southeast of Kandahar City.

Aid workers killed: Jacqueline Kirk and Shirley Case, Aug. 13, 2008.

Afghan civilians killed: The Canadian Defense Department does not keep figures on the number of Afghans killed or injured, says spokesperson Lt. Isabelle Riché. According to Human Rights Watch, in 2007 alone, 950 civilians were killed by the Taliban and other insurgents, and 434 by coalition forces in ground fire or air strikes.

Soldiers injured: 280 wounded in action, as of December 31 2007; 395 non-battle-related injuries while serving in Afghanistan.

Full cost: \$7 billion as of March 31, 2008, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, based on Defence Department Estimates; includes cost of feeding, transporting and equipping Canadian Forces' personnel. Incremental cost (operation cost): \$3 billion.

Duration of mission: The Harper government has said Canada will stay in Afghanistan until 2011.

Other coalition forces: 40 nations have contributed troops, including the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia and Italy.

Children in school: 7 million today, versus 1.2 million in 2001. Today, 2 million of those schoolchildren are girls, according to NATO's International Security Assistance Force.

Access to health care: Up to 83 percent of Afghans have access to basic healthcare, according to NATO, versus 8 percent in 2001.

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Rebel group in Niger claims responsibility for abduction of Canadian diplomat



OTTAWA - A rebel group in Niger claims it kidnapped and is holding the former Canadian envoy to the United Nations, Robert Fowler.

Harper hints at bailouts

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says the Conservative government will have to run a budget deficit to bring in billions of dollars worth of recovery programs for the hard-hit economy.

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Teen joy rides help make Manitoba car theft capital of Canada for 11th year in a row

WINNIPEG - A teen subculture fuelled by the thrill of stealing cars for joy rides has helped drive Manitoba to the No. 1 spot in the country yet again for vehicle thefts, according to Statistics Canada.

Family dog kills 10-year-old boy in Mexican city of Cuernavaca

murdered in the Mayerthorpe massacre were exhumed early Monday from a grave in his northern Alberta home town of Lac la Biche.

Hundreds of would-be senators flooding Tories with job requests

OTTAWA - The Conservative government is being inundated by hundreds of applicants longing to land one of the 18 Senate spots about to be filled by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

RCMP Taser policies show force not learning from Dziekanski death: critic

VANCOUVER, B.C. - The RCMP's acknowledgment that its updated Taser policies wouldn't have changed what happened to Robert Dziekanski is a sign the embattled national police force hasn't learned from the incident, says a critic of the controversial weapons.

CUERNAVACA, Mexico - Police say a 10-year-old boy was killed by his family's dog in central Mexico.

Arabs praise Iraqi reporter as a hero for tossing his shoes at Bush



BAGHDAD - Thousands of Iraqis took to the streets Monday to demand the release of a reporter who threw

his shoes at U.S. President George W. Bush in anger at American policies, as support for the act and the journalist flowed in from across the Arab world.

ATF says accelerant poured around Sarah Palin's church



ANCHORAGE,

Alaska - Federal investigators in Alaska say an accelerant was poured around the exterior of Gov. Sarah Palin's home church before it was heavily damaged by a fire.
