

Executive Summary

There is no clear plan. By this participants mean that they are not aware of a roadmap setting out specific goals or desired outcomes for being in Afghanistan. They have not heard of or seen any discussion as to what would constitute a successful outcome or what would be the markers for success in Afghanistan. This leaves participants feeling very pessimistic and participants then tend to liken Afghanistan to the Americans' experience in Iraq – "I don't see the clear plan ... it's the same as the U.S. in Iraq;"

Their sense is that little to no progress has been made to date. Notably, illuminating participants on the fact that Canada has been involved in Afghanistan for about five years tends to have the affect of heightening any concern that little progress has been made during this period of time. Many participants in fact question whether the Afghan people are better off now than they were five years ago. If this is the case, there seems to be little evidence that has been made public to support it. In addition, there is some expression of futility over the mission. There is a sense that once the international forces leave, the country will revert back to historical patterns of conflict;

There is a worry that the Canadian troops are not well enough equipped. This is reinforced by a view that Canadians are peacekeepers, not fighters. As peacekeepers, participants believe that Canada lacks the expertise to fight insurgent Taliban forces or search out terrorist enclaves in the mountainous areas of Afghanistan. This worry seems to stem from two preoccupations: first, that the Canadian contingent is too small to have any significant impact and second, that Canadian troops have been neglected over the last decade or more. On this latter point, it is likely that years of public discussion about cuts to the military, out of date or poorly maintained equipment, and low morale among members of the military has left Canadians with a perception that Canadian Forces are ill-prepared to operate effectively in the Afghanistan theatre;

Many are of the view that Canada may be imposing a "way of life" or cultural values on the Afghan people that is neither what they want nor something they have asked for. There is a strong sense that the Canadian mission has been imposed on the Afghan people and that many of the locals, apart from government officials, are resentful of the Canadian presence. Virtually no one is of the view that Canadians are in Afghanistan as a result of a United Nations security resolution and at the request of the Afghanistan government. Indeed some participants referred to the mission as the "invasion of Afghanistan," suggesting that Canadians are taking part in an aggression that contravenes or undermines the sovereignty of Afghanistan;

Participants see no clear benefit for Canada being in Afghanistan. The relevance of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan has not been clearly articulated to Canadians. They also struggle to ascertain whether Canada's involvement reduces or increases the risk of a terrorist attack at home.