

Fewer back Afghan mission

Support under 50% in Canada: poll Quebec leads opposition as latest data reflect a dramatic drop since 2006

BY BRADLEY BOUZANE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE OCTOBER 26, 2009

Support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan has dropped below 50 per cent, a new survey suggests, marking a significant decline over the past three years.

The online poll by the Innovative Research Group, done Tuesday through Friday, indicates 45 per cent of Canadians support the mission, down from 59 per cent in June 2006.

Quebecers voiced the most opposition to the mission, with 68 per cent saying they were against sending troops to Afghanistan. A majority of respondents in Alberta and the Atlantic provinces also opposed sending troops, with 51 per cent in each region saying so. In the three other regions polled - Ontario, the Prairies and British Columbia - between 42 and 44 per cent were opposed.

Wesley Wark, associate professor at the University of Toronto's Munk Centre for International Studies, said Quebec's opposition to the Canadian mission is not surprising.

"The outlook in Quebec tends to be at odds with the rest of Canada," Wark said.

"They tend to be not so sure the Canadian national interest is served by foreign wars. I'm sure that outlook has been reinforced when Quebec units, like the Van Doos, have taken highly publicized casualties" in Afghanistan.

Quebec and Atlantic Canada also felt most strongly that our military involvement risks Canadian lives "for no apparent benefit."

Sixty per cent of Quebecers and 45 per cent of Atlantic Canadians felt that way, the poll suggested.

Greg Lyle, director of the firm that conducted the survey for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, said the most surprising part of the poll was that Canadians were generally less willing to deploy troops to any conflict zones as casualties in Afghanistan mount; 47 per cent agreed there are times when Canada needs to be ready to intervene, down from 55 per cent in June 2006.

"Canadians have become less willing in principle to send troops overseas," he said.

Quebec again led the charge against active duty for Canadian troops, as 41 per cent of Quebecers said they "always opposed sending the Canadian military into war," compared with the national average of 21 per cent.

On maintaining a military presence beyond the pullout date of 2011 if asked to do so by the United States, Quebec and Alberta were most opposed, by margins of 63 and 55 per cent, respectively.

Nationwide, 49 per cent of respondents opposed the extension of our military presence if asked by the U.S., while 40 per cent favoured it.

The results of the poll of more than 1,000 people are considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

In Kabul, Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his top rival, Abdullah Abdullah, said this weekend they had ruled out a power-sharing deal before the country's presidential runoff election Nov. 7.

Abdullah may boycott the runoff if his demands are not met to remove the leaders of Afghanistan's election commission, who he believes are biased against him, campaign officials said yesterday.

the new york times and the washington post contributed to this report

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