

Support for mission below 50%

Bradley Bouzane

Canwest News Service

Monday, 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 survey by the Innovative Research Group, conducted between Oct. 20 and Oct. 23, indicates 45 per cent of Canadians support the mission, down from 59 per cent in June 2006.

Residents in Quebec voiced the most opposition to the Canadian mission in the war-torn country, with 68 per cent of those polled in the online survey saying they were against sending troops to Afghanistan.

Elsewhere in the country, a majority of respondents in Alberta and the Atlantic provinces were also opposed to sending troops, each with 51 per cent of respondents against sending troops.

The other three regions polled -- Ontario, the Prairies and B.C. -- were between 42 and 44 per cent against the idea.

Wesley Wark, associate professor at the University of Toronto's Munk Centre for International Studies, said Quebec's widespread opposition to the Canadian mission is not surprising and has been evident in previous Canadian conflicts.

"The outlook in Quebec tends to be at odds with the rest of Canada," Wark said Saturday. "It was true in (the Second World War), it was true in (the First World War) and it was true in the Korean War.

"They tend to be not so sure that 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 the Atlantic provinces also felt more strongly than other regions that Canada's military involvement was "putting Canadian lives at risk for no apparent benefit."

Some 60 per cent of Quebec residents and 45 per cent of respondents from Atlantic Canada felt that way, the survey suggested.

The next highest regions were Ontario and Alberta, with 34 per cent each, agreeing with



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Afghan university students shout anti-U.S. slogans during a demonstration in front of the parliament building on Sunday in Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghans gathered in the capital at a mass protest, burning an effigy of U.S. President Barack Obama, after allegations were made that Western troops fighting the Taliban desecrated a copy of the Koran.

the sentiment.

But pollster Greg Lyle, director of the firm that conducted the survey for the Ottawa-based Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, said the most surprising finding was the fact that Canadians were generally found to be less willing to deploy troops to any conflict zones as casualties in Afghanistan mount; 47 per cent of respondents agreed there are times when Canada needs to be ready to intervene, even if our military may be killed and injured, down from 55 per cent in June 2006.

"That means there's a fundamental change in the value structure Canadians bring to conflict," he said. "Canadians have become less willing to send troops overseas in principle."

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KARZAI CROSS

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai questioned the reliability of the United States as a partner Sunday, as he fought off criticism of his government's legitimacy following fraud-marred elections.

Karzai's main challenger, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, warned in an interview with CNN that the U.S. strategy will not succeed without a credible partner in Kabul, blaming Karzai for deteriorating conditions. But underscoring the political headache that Washington faces if Karzai wins a run-off against Abdullah next month, Karzai pointed the finger at the United States in a separate, pre-recorded CNN interview.

"Is the United States a reliable partner with Afghanistan? Is the West a reliable partner with Afghanistan?" Karzai asked. "Have we received the commitments that we were given? Have we been treated like a partner?"

Karzai said a partnership to him was "where the Afghan lives are respected, where Afghan property is respected, where the Afghan traditions are respected, where we know the direction we are moving to."

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