

Left-wing “research” makes cannon fodder of Canadian soldiers

By Bob Bergen

The left wing in Canada has been doing its level best to equate Canadian foreign and defence policy under Prime Minister Stephen Harper with American President George Bush for some time now. But a new study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) making headlines across Canada has broken shameless new ground implying that Canadian troops in Afghanistan are little more cannon fodder.

First the good news: the study “Canada’s Fallen: Understanding Canadian Military Deaths in Afghanistan” drives home the fact that Canada is at war in Afghanistan, as evidenced by the growing number of combat casualties returning to Canada in flag-draped coffins.

Canadians need to know that the Canadian Forces war against the Taliban, drug runners, war lords and insurgents all backed by Al Qaeda is the real thing.

An impending shipment of 15 Canadian tanks there and 120 combat and support troops from the Edmonton-based Lord Strathcona’s Horse (Royal Canadians) ought to drive that point home in spades.

The bad news is that “Canada’s Fallen” uses a variety of “statistics” to make a case that Canadian troops are suffering a disproportionate number of casualties compared to other NATO allies.

It goes further, making a case that a Canadian in Afghanistan is four and a half times more likely to die than an American soldier. It makes other claims, but this is one of the most egregious.

Mark Twain was famously quoted saying there are: “lies, damn lies and statistics.”

Here is how the report’s statistics abuse the picture of Canadians’ involvement in the conflict.

The study points out that America has nearly half of the troops in Afghanistan – with 18,500 – and some 269 deaths.

Given Canada’s 32 deaths from all causes at the time of the report’s writing – compared to its 2,000 soldiers in a pure cold body-to-death ratio – it finds that Canadians are four and a half times more likely to die than Americans.

The worst period includes March 2, to Sept. 4, 2006, when 24 Canadians died after the move to Kandahar. What is appalling is the study claims that, based on its calculations, there could be another 140 Canadian deaths from all causes if the rate were to remain unchanged.

Just one historical will demonstrate what is wrong with such an analysis. On August 19, 1942, 4,963 Canadians were sent to attack the beach at Dieppe, France, in the first major Canadian action of the Second World War. Of them, 907 were killed and 1,946 remained hostage.

To compare that death rate on the very worst day of the war to American casualties or to calculate that, based on that experience, Canada would lose an extrapolated number of soldiers over the war’s duration if the rate were to remain unchanged would be pure folly.

The study asks why Canadians are dying in Afghanistan in such high numbers.

Its highly-political answer is that had Canada continued in its peace support missions in Kabul, instead of taking the fight to the Taliban in the south, Canada would have suffered far fewer casualties.

The CCPA study is nothing less than pseudo-science cherry picking numbers from wherever they can be gleaned to support a political argument.

It also leaves begging the issue of who, instead of the Canadians, would take the fight to the Taliban which has been absolutely merciless toward the Afghan women and children it has blown up for merely talking to Canadians.

Regardless, the report’s political message will play well to the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party leadership candidates who have absolutely no qualms about making as much political hay for themselves as possible from Canadian casualties.

In the end, the study’s single-minded focus on casualties misses other important questions that could be asked about the nature of the Afghan mission which might provide better indicators of whether Canadians have died in vain, for that is the real issue.

They include: What is being done to reduce casualties? Is the mission worthwhile? How is reconstruction going? To what degree is civilian life returning to normal, as if anything in Afghanistan could be normal by North American standards?

There is no denying that Canadians are involved in heavy combat.

That is because the Canadians’ mission has changed three times since 2001 (remember 9/11 and the cause of all of this?) and has become ever more dangerous since.

As a result, the Canadians have progressively adjusted their armoured requirements in step with changes

in Taliban tactics.

In order to counter the insurgents' recent switch from guerrilla warfare to dug-in warfare, the Canadians will soon square off against them with the Lord Strathcona's Leopard tanks.

The Strathcona's I know who will soon be deploying to Afghanistan aren't going there to become cannon fodder or statistics.

They tell me they're going there to reduce casualties and save Canadian lives.

That's a dangerous, dangerous job.

Someone should tell the report's authors that.

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