

***The Unexpected War* a predictable diatribe on Afghanistan**

One day, a good book is going to be written about how Canada became enmeshed in the war in southern Afghanistan.

Sadly, the new book *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, by Liberal sympathizers Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, isn't it.

It is difficult to know where to begin criticism of this apology for the Liberal governments which first committed Canada to Afghanistan.

But, the early days of John McCallum's appointment as defence minister in May 2002, by then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien eight months after 9/11 are as good as any to start.

It leads off with the authors describing McCallum's first few weeks on the job hardly hearing anything from his military advisors about Afghanistan, discussing instead more money for defence, maritime helicopters, transport aircraft and the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence system. It wasn't until June 28, one month after McCallum had taken office, that then- Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Ray Henault briefed the minister and told him he would receive a diplomatic note from the United States for a renewed Canadian military presence in Afghanistan.

Somehow, this is portrayed as the military's fault.

What is wrong with the defence minister showing leadership on Afghanistan and demanding briefings on the biggest military mission Canada would be involved in since the Korean War?

For those who don't know about this field, it's called civil-military relations and involves the informed oversight of military forces by elected civilians.

Clearly, although *The Unexpected War* doesn't put it this way, there was precious-little informed oversight taking place by the Liberals in Ottawa.

McCallum had no idea what challenges Afghanistan presented and decided that he had to travel to Afghanistan to learn, but his generals were apparently opposed.

Astoundingly, it was Sasha Trudeau, son of Prime Minister Pierre, who told him: "You're the minister, tell them you are going," which he then did.

That the generals are portrayed as a gang of bullies should come as no surprise given that Lang, one of its authors, was McCallum's chief of staff at the time.

Bill Graham fared no better as the new defence minister in 2004 when defence officials "failed" to brief him on the recommended location for the Canadian Provincial Construction Team in Kandahar.

And who was Graham's chief of staff? Lang, who apparently had learned nothing from his two years with McCallum.

Indeed, when there is any mention of McCallum's chief of staff, he is referred to disingenuously in the third person.

It gets worse, the book describes McCallum's first meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, who it says would become synonymous with "arrogance, intransigence, misguided policy and abject military failure."

Then it elaborates on Rumsfeld's "astonishing ignorance of counterinsurgency and the strategies and tactics" they use.

How about Liberal gang's own astonishing ignorance?

Almost begrudging respect is paid to the intellect and skill of current Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier, who it says, single-handedly bamboozled the best minds in Ottawa into adopting Canada's International Policy statement.

That should come as no surprise, given that Lang was quoted in *The Globe and Mail* on Aug. 10, 2006, saying: "The problem is, there isn't anyone who can take him (Hillier) on with a counter world view. He blows them away."

The problem wasn't Rick Hillier: the problem was with the Liberals who were supposed to exercise informed oversight over him.

The book's arguments about a lack of detail from "officials" about the merits of ballistic missile defence and a "staggering inability to articulate what BMD was" are backed with a litany of footnotes.

But, the footnotes don't reference original documents to back up the claims that a meticulously researched work would. Rather, the footnotes quote a host of like-minded Liberal hacks such as Scott Reid, Paul Martin's communications director.

One of the final insults comes after it quotes Lang's former boss, Graham, who said in an author interview on January 30, 2007: "There is no doubt about it. We've watched this mission evolve differently from when we got into it."

The book then says: "Most important, any government owes its citizens a clear, compelling, and honest explanation of why its soldiers are fighting and dying."

That's true, but it is also gratuitous.

A good time to explain to Canadians why its soldiers were fighting and dying would have been during the summer of 2005 when Graham and Hillier agreed to tour Canada talking about "what the mission meant for Canada, why it was the right mission, what Canada would be doing for the people of Afghanistan and how the mission would be dangerous for the Canadian Forces."

On September 23, 2005, newspapers were awash in stories quoting Graham warning Canadians of the perils of Afghanistan and the dangers of Kandahar.

In the end, if I had to pick the most-upsetting part about reading this self-serving diatribe, it would be knowing that I paid \$33.39 to do it.

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