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Afghan mission increasing chances for terror at home: poll

By KATHLEEN HARRIS



OTTAWA (Sun Media) - Nearly half of Canadians think the Conservative government is fumbling the war effort in Afghanistan and a majority want to bring the troops home if the death toll continues to mount.

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A new SES Research poll finds 54.6% of Canadians want a withdrawal if casualties climb, compared to 39.3% who see fallen soldiers as an unfortunate but necessary part of the mission.



"Canadians look at what the trade-offs are in terms of whether the mission can succeed, not just the financial cost of the mission but the human cost," said SES President Nik Nanos.

"I think it's pretty clear that a majority of Canadians think if the casualties continue then we should have a pull-out."

The difference of opinion is most stark with Conservative voters, who are much more likely than Liberal, NDP, Bloc Quebecois or Green supporters to accept blood in the war zone. But Nanos said it's not even a slam-dunk for committed Tories, since nearly 40% would call for a troop withdrawal if casualties continue.

Nanos said the numbers suggest a major incident with a high death count could smash the foundation of support for the mission and escalate the issue politically for the Conservatives.

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The poll also reveals a whopping 67% of Canadians believe Canada's presence in Afghanistan is actually making our country more vulnerable to a terrorist attack. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has consistently sold the mission as a way to bring democracy to Afghans while keeping the terrorist threat at bay, yet only 17.9% of Canadians believe our military might is cutting Canada's risk of an attack at home.

"One of the justifications for the mission in Afghanistan and the war on terror is to make us all safer, but I think for average Canadians they understand the political reality - if you're going to pick a fight and somebody else is home, there are repercussions back in Canada," said Nanos. "They know that just by being engaged in Afghanistan that we're making ourselves a target."

Canadians are split on how well the Conservative government is managing the mission, with 48.3% saying they disagree or somewhat disagree with the government's course and 43.9% saying they agree or somewhat agree with how the operation has been handled.

The SES poll also reveals that a majority of Canadians (54.6%) don't think Canada and NATO have deployed the necessary resources in Afghanistan to succeed.

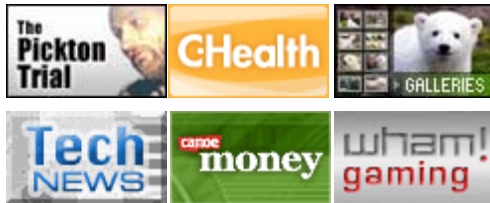
The SES Research poll surveyed 1,000 Canadians between April 26 and May 1, 2007 by telephone, and is considered accurate within 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.



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Columnist **LICIA CORBELLA**

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