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By **LORRIE GOLDSTEIN**

E-MAIL TO A FRIEND PRINT PAGE WRITE US LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Anyway you look at it, today's SES Research/Sun Media poll on the attitude of Canadians to our military mission in Afghanistan is bad news for Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

More than half of those surveyed say neither Canada nor NATO has deployed the resources necessary for success.

More than two out of three think our presence in Afghanistan makes us more vulnerable, not less, to a terrorist attack in Canada.

More than half say if there are further casualties -- a given since we're there until 2009 -- Canada should pull out.

Finally, more Canadians (48.3%) disagree with the government's management of the mission than agree (43.9%).

Pollster Nik Nanos, who nailed the results of the last two federal elections, says that at the moment, Afghanistan is "poison" to Harper's chances of winning a majority government.

Which leaves the PM with a choice -- hang tough and hope things get better, although it's hard to see how, or listen to what Canadians are saying.

Of course, "cutting and running," as Harper has dismissively described it, isn't an option.

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Not if the PM is a leader worthy of the name who believes in what he says.

But he does need a new defence minister who can effectively explain to Canadians why we're in Kandahar.

After 15 months in office, highlighted by his recent incompetent performance over allegations that detainees handed over by our soldiers to Afghan authorities were tortured, it's obvious Gordon O'Connor isn't that minister.

But simply putting in someone with better communication skills won't do any good unless he or she has a better message to communicate.

Canadians are concerned about the disproportionate burden placed on our soldiers in Kandahar, while other NATO countries shirk their responsibilities.

Right now, it looks as if NATO either doesn't know how to make this mission work, or doesn't care if it succeeds.

Harper must deliver that message forcefully to our allies.

Realistically, there's no easy or quick way to change the views of the two-thirds of Canadians who believe our mission in Afghanistan makes us more vulnerable to terrorism at home. That said, deciding the best way to defend Canada's security is the PM's responsibility alone, and it's more important that he be right than popular.

We agree with Harper (and the previous Liberal government) that our mission in Afghanistan is vital to that effort. However, Canadians do need to be shown that it has a demonstrable chance of success, both in its warfighting and reconstruction components.

We know our soldiers have been carrying out both aspects of this very tough assignment with distinction.

It's up to Harper to find a way to communicate that. It's his job.

Next story: Air India revelations add to grief

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