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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello to All USINNI Members. I hope this newsletter finds you and yours well.

We are well into our fall season now, and with that comes Remembrance Day. It is a time we should all reflect on the great legacy that has been left to us by those that sacrificed so we can live the lives we do today. Not just those that made the ultimate sacrifice, but



great country. I am fully aware that for the most part I am preaching to the converted, but I remind you that your remembrance at this time

of year sets an example for all to follow. An example that must continue if we are to learn and benefit from the lessons of history.

As per our custom for the November Luncheon/meeting, we will not have a guest speaker, but we will hold a Remembrance Ceremony.

I hope to see you all then.

Edwin

Nanaimo, 10 October 2019. Let me preface this particular Musing Column with the candid admission that I have my likes and dislikes when it comes to the Middle East. Why, hell's bells; like most of us, I've got all kinds of likes and dislikes; some to my credit, others less so!

From my own two "hands-on" years spent in that region, I grew to appreciate the Jordanian Hashemites, the Druze of Lebanon, and, the displaced Kurds I encountered here and there. Most of the rest, Christians, Jews & Muslims alike, in the main, weren't to be trusted. The Kurds are a people racially distinct from today's Middle Eastern host nations...Turkey, Iran, Iraq & Syria... where most of them live. Most are Sunni Muslim, but not exclusively or dogmatically so. Kurds

MILITARY AND SECURITY MUSING:

Throwing the Kurds Under the Bus

in the region today number just over 35 million. More-so than is the case for most Middle Eastern ethnicities, the Kurds are much more tolerant of other religions and beliefs co-existing in their midst. At the very least, shelter for the dislocated is being provided amongst the Kurds now, where others just turn their backs, some of the latter with genocide in mind.

There is, however, another uglier face

to the Kurds. Historically, they are up to their elbows in drug trafficking, something that has been the case for at least the last 60 to 70 years. They're not alone in this. Most governments in the

In particular, the now long-running unstable situation in Iraq and Syria has given indigenous Kurds the opportunity to carve out areas of influence for themselves. Currently, in the Kurdish-inhabited



Middle East are complicit, one way or another, as long as they get their cut, and, that the problems with addiction end up in Europe and North America.

That aside, Kurds have been fighting unsuccessfully for their own homeland since the Third Century. More recently, following the First World War, the Allies briefly agreed to the establishment of Kurdistan. It was to have been made up from parts of south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and south-western Armenia. Nationalist resistance to the notion of an independent Kurdistan, led largely by Turkey, was universal to the region. Kurdistan faded away in 1923, although some local autonomy was won in areas mandated to the French and British. However, following the end of the Second World War and the subsequent decolonization of the region, the Kurds were crudely “brought to heel” by new masters. The dream of a modern united Kurdistan faded, although it has not entirely disappeared.

areas of both Syria & Iraq, the Kurds appear to do most of the fighting against ITGIS/ISIS on behalf of the two central governments. In the process, they run de facto semi-autonomous regional governments. It is the prospect of this kind of thinking spreading to Turkey’s own 12 million Kurds that has President Erdogan so determined to nip circa-2019 Kurdistan in the bud.

The Shia governments of both Syria and Iraq remain somewhat dependent on and appreciative of the Kurds’ core front-line assistance in bringing down and keeping down the brief caliphate established by radical Sunni ITGIS/ISIS/daesh/al Qaeda. However, much like Turkey, neither Iraq nor Syria will wish to see Kurdistan re-emerge from the resultant rubble. At the same time though, the Shia-dominated governments in Damascus and Baghdad continue to struggle against Sunni rebellions that the Turks unquestionably would prefer to see succeed, while the Kurds don’t. The playing fields are extraordinarily com-

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Al Qaeda Expands its Presence in Afghanistan

By Scott DesMarais and Emily Estelle
October 22, 2019

This analysis is co-published by the [Institute for the Study of War](#) and the [Critical Threats Project](#) at the American Enterprise Institute.

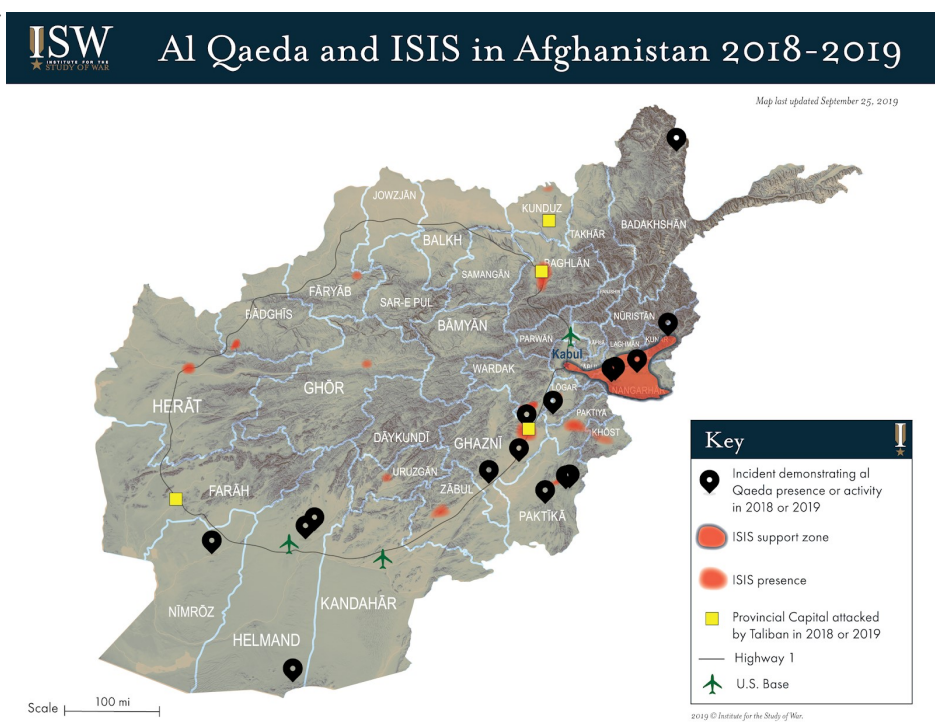
Key Takeaway: *Al Qaeda has expanded its presence in Afghanistan since 2014 in collaboration with the Taliban. The Taliban and al Qaeda maintain, and will sustain, an enduring and intimate relationship that invalidates the premise of U.S. negotiations with the Taliban. The Taliban-al Qaeda partnership will allow al Qaeda militants to exploit any potential U.S. military withdrawal to expand further their access to safe havens in Afghanistan.*

U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper reaffirmed the Trump Administration’s intent to reach a political agreement and continue the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan during a visit to the country on October 21. U.S. President Donald Trump halted negotiations with the Taliban in September in the wake of a bombing in the country’s capital that killed a U.S. soldier. It is unclear whether the U.S. and the Taliban will resume talks in the near term. Meanwhile, al Qaeda continues to expand its presence in Afghanistan in a close relationship with the Taliban that undermines a central premise of talks: that the Taliban will break with al Qaeda as part of a peace deal. Al Qaeda has already exploited previous U.S. drawdowns and is prepared to surge in collaboration with the Taliban if the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda has prioritized its re-entry into Afghanistan since 2014, when the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) drew down forces. Al Qaeda Emir Ayman al Zawahiri announced the formation of al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) in 2014, a move intended to counter the Islamic State’s declaration of a so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria as well as exploit the ISAF drawdown. Al Qaeda’s re-entry into Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan forced the U.S. to resume counter-terrorism operations there in 2015.

Senior AQIS leaders and Taliban commanders are co-located in Afghanistan today, signaling an enduring and high-level partnership. American and Afghan forces targeted a joint Taliban-al Qaeda compound in Musah Qal’ah District, a Taliban stronghold considered the group’s de facto capital, in Helmand Province on September 22. Multiple Afghan security organizations reported that the operation killed senior AQIS leader Asim Umar and a courier who connected AQIS leaders to Zawahiri. Afghanistan’s intelligence agency and a U.S. official have since confirmed Umar’s death in the raid. The operation also targeted several Taliban commanders from districts in Helmand Province. It is a sign of the extent of al Qaeda’s return to the area.

The joint compound in Musah Qal’ah is only one example of the depth and breadth of the Taliban-al Qaeda relationship. Al Qaeda members are embedded with the Taliban at positions throughout Afghanistan. The U.S. military assessed in February 2019 that approximately 200 al Qaeda militants are active in Kabul, Badakhshan, Kunar, Paktia, Helmand, and Nimroz Provinces. The UN Security Council (UNSC) assessed that al Qaeda “considers Afghanistan a continuing safe haven for its leadership” and that al Qaeda continues to rely “on its long-standing and strong relationship with the Taliban leadership” in July 2019. The UNSC also assessed that al Qaeda is actively attempting to grow its presence in Shighnan District in Badakhshan Province and Bermal District in Paktika Province. A senior Taliban official said in December 2018



that several thousand foreign fighters operate in Taliban territory. Many of these fighters are likely affiliated with al Qaeda. Durable alliances between al Qaeda militants and Taliban members indicate an entrenched al Qaeda network embedded within the Taliban. Al Qaeda members also provide military and religious instruction to the Taliban.

The U.S. cannot expect the Taliban to fulfill its counter-terrorism requirements against al Qaeda. The Taliban has already demonstrated that it will not act to thwart al Qaeda. The Taliban neither severed ties with al Qaeda nor took action to prevent terrorists from operating in Afghanistan, as it promised in a now-defunct draft agreement with the U.S. in early September. Al Qaeda will continue to exploit its relationship with the Taliban to expand its presence in Afghanistan and will accelerate this expansion if the U.S. withdraws.

Defence issues could be on the back burner as minority Liberal government focuses on survival

David Pugliese, Ottawa Citizen October 23, 2019

As the Trudeau government focuses on its survival and seeking political support from potential allies like the NDP or the Greens, key defence issues could be put on the back burner or become part of any backroom quid pro quo.

Dealing with health care, affordable housing, pipelines, the environment and healing rifts with Alberta and Saskatchewan are expected to be just some of the top issues facing the minority Liberal government. Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Jon Vance has been telling headquarters staff in Ottawa that with the world becoming more dangerous he expects a steady flow of funding for the Canadian Forces to continue.

That, however, isn't a given. Some of the Liberal's election promises come with a steep cost, including the \$6 billion needed to be set aside for the first four years of a pharmacare program and a plan to improve access to medical services.

Defence and security issues were barely mentioned during the federal election campaign, even though billions of dollars in equipment purchases will need to be approved by the government in the coming years.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau backed away Wednesday from forming a coalition with one of the opposition parties, but he did emphasize collaborating with the other party leaders on various issues. That could open the potential to work together on certain defence files.

The Liberals have talked about using more Canadian military resources to deal with climate-related disasters and to provide help to poorer nations dealing with the effects of climate change. Those are initiatives both the Greens and the NDP could get behind as they mirror proposals from those parties.

The NDP has also stated it wants a fair competition for new fighter jets and to keep the multi-billion dollar shipbuilding procurement on schedule. The Green Party more generally has supported a well-equipped Canadian military but hasn't gone into details.

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... Under the Bus continued from page 2

plicated and unpredictable ones. The wars within wars are secular and sectarian all in one breath. Everyone involved have their own competing Machiavellian ambitions in and for the region. Turkey may yet see a Sunni Government in Damascus at the point of their bayonets, even if one autocracy is simply replaced by another. Donald Trump's stunning declaration of October 6th hasn't helped. He undercut his own Kurdish allies of Northern Syria without any evident thought to the almost certain consequences.

Almost certainly against the advice and expectations of his own military and political advisors, Trump <https://shipsforcanada.ca/images/story-images/ABCO-3.PNG> dumped the Kurds in favour of the prospects of a quid pro quo of some kind from Erdogan. In this he is going to be disappointed. The Kurds may be under this particular bus, but there's a steamroller headed the Joker's way, with Donald Trump's name on it.

In the end, the only beneficiaries in all of this will be the unpredictable Shia backed by Iran on one hand, and, homicidal Sunni Islam on the other. Between them, Erdogan and Trump have simply ensured there will not be "peace in our time." The Middle East continues its now certain slide into Armageddon.



The views expressed in this column are those of Colonel (Retd) W.J. (Bill) McCullough, a Past President of our Institute and the long-time Chair of our Military Committee. His columns are the product of his own experience, research, midnight musing & wishful thinking.

Footnote: This Column has quickly been overtaken by more recent events in the Middle East. Russia, Turkey and Iran are now driving the bus, each with competing ambitions for the Region. The wheels may yet fall off their wagon. In this region, they almost always do.

Defence issues... continued from page 4

Bloc leader Yves François Blanchet has said his priority is not sovereignty but to promote Quebec interests. That includes a push to see Davie Shipbuilding in Levis, Que., named as the third yard under the federal shipbuilding strategy. The Bloc's wishes coincide with the Liberal's efforts to steer more shipbuilding work toward Davie.

The politics of a minority government could also come into play on the project to acquire a future fighter jet. Although the Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighter is now seen as the leading candidate, an aerospace union is raising warnings that the selection of that plane could mean large-scale job losses in Quebec.

In early September the Machinists Union complained that the Liberal government bowed to pressure from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to change rules to keep the F-35 in the procurement race but at the expense of other firms offering guaranteed work for Canada's aerospace sector.

The union is worried that if Canada were to purchase the F-35 then most of the long-term maintenance would be done in the U.S. That, noted the labour organization, would put in jeopardy the 600 jobs at L-3 Harris in Montreal that are linked to maintaining the Royal Canadian Air Force's current CF-18 fleet. "We will follow the situation closely and demand that manufacturing and maintenance activities of the next fighter aircraft take place in Quebec," said David Chartrand, the Quebec co-ordinator of the Machinists Union.

Any loss of 600 jobs in Quebec is bound to get the

attention of the Bloc Québécois and cause problems for the Liberals.

Trudeau also said Wednesday he would swear in a new gender-balanced cabinet on Nov. 20. Trudeau will be in need of experienced ministers in various high-profile cabinet positions, so there is a strong possibility Harjit Sajjan, who served as defence minister, and Carla Qualtrough, the procurement minister, might end up in new portfolios.

There have been suggestions at National Defence headquarters that Liberal MP Karen McCrimmon, a retired air force officer who won

re-election in Kanata-Carleton, could be a potential candidate for the defence portfolio. McCrimmon, a former lieutenant colonel, was the first woman in Canada to qualify as an air navigator and the first to command an air force squadron.

Such a choice would meet Trudeau's needs for a female cabinet member with experience in the portfolio.



Simulated opposing forces attack a defensive position occupied by members of the Canadian Army Reserve, 4th Canadian Division, during Exercise STALWART GUARDIAN on August 26, 2015 at Garrison Petawawa.

AOPS Landing Craft Ready for Action



Sea trials of RCN Arctic & Offshore Patrol Vessel landing craft completed. 1st craft delivered. Significant capability for Harry DeWolf-class ships to operate off austere shores globally.

This month's Luncheon/Meeting will be held at

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 257

7727 LANTZVILLE ROAD, LANTZVILLE, BC

on

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER OCTOBER 13th, 2019

1130 HOURS

\$25.00 per member/person. Guests welcome.

LUNCHEON MEETING ATTENDANCE

Your telephone contact coordinator will attempt to contact you in the days prior to our monthly luncheon/meeting in order to confirm your attendance. In this manner we can provide attendance numbers to the volunteer kitchen staff at RCL 257 so that they may prepare adequately for our function.

If for some reason she has missed you, please contact her or Edwin at 250-751-2360 or ejpeeters@shaw.ca.

A thru E

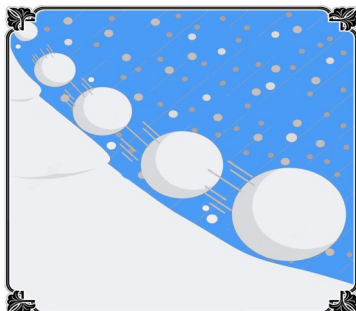
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USINNI SNOWBALL

As we did not have a winner for last month's Snowball Draw the jackpot will be carried over.

Remember you can't win if you do not sign in, and you can't sign in unless you attend the luncheon/meeting.

More anticipation, more excitement, more fun, more reward.