

**Taliban threat is PR ploy, says Day**

Tue Jun 19, 6:11 PM

By Jim Brown

OTTAWA (CP) - A Taliban threat to send suicide squads to attack Canada is a desperate public relations ploy by a movement that's losing the battle on the ground in Afghanistan, says Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day.

"Their purpose is to strike terror, put fear in people's hearts," Day said Tuesday.

"I think the Taliban are aware that our troops cannot be intimidated, our troops prevail on the field of battle in Afghanistan. And so they're trying through public relations means to worry the hearts of Canadians at home."

Day expressed doubt, based on the latest intelligence gathered by Canada and its allies, that the Taliban can mount an attack in North America. Nevertheless, he said, Canadian security officials will remain vigilant.

"It's a sign of desperation, but it's not a sign that can be dismissed," he said. "We take threats seriously. We've always said that Canada is not immune to threats of terrorism."

The minister's remarks came in response to a video, obtained by ABC News, in which a Taliban military commander speaks of suicide attacks against Canada and other countries with troops currently stationed in Afghanistan.

"These Americans, Canadians, British and Germans come here to Afghanistan from faraway places," Mansoor Dadullah tells a graduating class at a training camp run jointly with al-Qaida. "Why shouldn't we go after them?"

Bev Busson, acting commissioner of the RCMP, said it would be wrong to see the video as an escalation in a terrorist threat that has long existed against Canada.

Nevertheless, she said Tuesday, the RCMP isn't dismissing its importance: "We never ignore these kinds of threats."

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service said little, except that it also takes the video seriously and continues to monitor the situation. Beyond that, spokeswoman Barbara Campion declined to discuss what action, if any, CSIS is taking in response.

Jim Judd, the director of the security service, told a Senate committee in April that he didn't believe the deployment of Canadian troops to Afghanistan had increased the likelihood of a retaliatory attack at home.

On the contrary, he said, "I would argue that it has had the opposite effect of somewhat constraining the threat to Canada" by striking a military blow against terrorist groups operating out of Afghanistan.

But Wesley Wark, a University of Toronto analyst, said that view isn't shared by everybody. He cited reports by the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre - a clearing house of federal intelligence information - that suggest Canadian military action could indeed provoke retaliation.

"There has been a debate going on in Ottawa about whether the concern over blowback (from Afghanistan) can be taken seriously or not," said Wark.

"I suspect the threat assessment may shift now, just on the basis of prudence and caution . . . It might be necessary to take it a little more seriously."

John Thompson of the Mackenzie Institute, a Toronto-based think tank, said few believe the Taliban have the ability to mount an intercontinental mission that would strike at Canada. But that doesn't mean the public should be complacent.

The real threat, he said, is potential home-grown terrorist cells, perhaps acting in loose coalition with al-Qaida. Similar groups have mounted bomb attacks on rail and transit facilities in Britain and Spain.

"Ninety per cent of these cells are caught before they launch a successful attack," said Thompson. " But they're learning. The next wave are going to be a lot more astute and a lot more careful. It's not going to stop for decades."

Martin Rudner, a Carleton University expert on terrorism, agreed this is no time for complacency. He thinks the Taliban and its al-Qaida allies could mount a terror campaign in an effort to weaken the resolve of the Canadian public to keep the troops in Afghanistan.

"The logic of it is, yes, it's to be taken seriously," said Rudner. "From their point of view we, the infidels, have assaulted the world of Islam with a military presence. It's therefore religiously sanctioned that they counter-attack to expel us and impose a defeat on us."

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