

comment

Letters to the editor

Are troops staying to protect pipeline?

Re: "Canada can't walk away from Afghans,"
(Mercedes Stephenson, Nov. 15.)

In her column Stephenson begs the geopolitical question: What is the connection between Canadian troops staying in Afghanistan and plans for a natural gas pipeline through Kandahar?

That pipeline is the elephant in the closet — Afghanistan's largest development project. Planning is on the front burner again. The four participating countries (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India) announced last week they are negotiating the final key issues so their presidents can sign formal agreements in December. They coincidentally envisage completion by 2014 — a magic date for Ottawa, too.

A paramount issue is pipeline security. Can Afghan security forces protect the route single-handedly, during construction and afterwards? Will Kabul call on NATO for help? Defence Minister Peter MacKay and NATO officials have indicated they would consider a request to protect pipelines, if asked.

In Gatineau this year, the G8 endorsed the pipeline project. The sponsor is the Asian Development Bank, of which Canada (and numerous NATO countries) are proud members. The U.S. is pushing hard for that pipeline. It's part of their geopolitical strategy in Central Asia. Canadians need to ask: Are our troops staying in Afghanistan to protect a pipeline route?

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