[**Strongpoint Mushan: The Battle You Don’t Know About**](http://everitas.rmcclub.ca/?p=11755)

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**Strongpoint Mushan: The Battle You Don’t Know About**

*Is timely and responds to a National Post piece that appeared recently and was very critical of the mission in Afghanistan.*

*By: Dr. Sean M. Maloney*

Brian Hutchison criticizes the withdrawal from Strongpoint Mushan, which he erroneously labels a Canadian position. It was, in fact, an Afghan National Army strongpoint manned by a 70-man Afghan infantry company and 2-12 Canadian mentors. The [**article**](http://www.nationalpost.com/news/canada/story.html?id=1737628) builds on a meme already established by the National Post’s competition that goes like this: withdrawal from strong points like Mushan is an admission of “failure”, therefore Canada is “retreating” and therefore “losing.” The same argument was made about the Gumbad Platoon House in 2006 and Forward Operating Base Martello in Shah Wali Kot district back in 2007. Commanders in the field are obligated to adjust their limited forces and focus them on priority areas. Like Martello and Gumbad, Mushan has ceased to be a priority. Afghan commanders Kandahar Province have decided to move their forces elsewhere.

The real story behind Mushan is rooted in complex coalition politics. Mushan was originally an outpost manned by corrupt Afghan ‘police’ back in 2006-07: the town was a cross roads for those trying to move contraband through Panjwayi district. The Afghan army forcibly removed the ‘police’ and established a presence there in 2007. A variety of interested parties, including the Taliban, reacted to this development with violence, which in turn resulted in requests to Canadian forces to assist and support the Afghan army. As Canada had no helicopters, the only means to support Mushan was by ground. These convoys were attacked with IEDs as the Taliban and other opponents sought to isolate the strongpoint and force it to withdraw.

Mushan was supposed to be the anchor for a chain of positions that were to be manned by Afghan police, but they never arrived in numbers sufficient to project a security presence. Throughout 2008, Mushan became Panjwayi district’s own ‘Alamo’ as commanders, both Afghan and Canadian, debated whether to remain there. The enemy increased the pressure on Mushan, hoping to force the coalition troops out, while Canadian commanders tried to ensure that Mushan didn’t become a trap to draw off scarce forces from Arghandab district, Zharey district, eastern Panjwayi district, and Kandahar City. Mushan became an “economy of force” operation whereby a small force acts in the place a larger one and generates effects disproportionate to its size. And it succeeded.

Inadvertently at first, more deliberately later, Mushan became “fly paper” as the enemy committed more forces to convince the coalition forces to quit. As those resources were identified, they were targeted by coalition artillery, airpower, and other forces which led the enemy to commit more of his scarce mortars, facilitators, and IED emplacers. The Canadian mentors and Afghan troops sortied from Mushan in support of these and other operations in Zharey and Panjwayi districts, which frustrated the enemy no end-Mushan was a “cork” that was interfering with their movements. The surrounded Afghans and Canadians endured extreme hardships in that position and fought valiantly throughout 2008, while media attention was focused elsewhere on issues like alleged detainee abuse and development matters.

Those enemy resources could not be applied elsewhere-like in the Bazaar-e Panjwayi area, or against the Afghan police sub-stations in Zharey, or against the deploying American forces to the west in Maywand district. At the same time, the Afghan National Army commanders had to respond to urgent requests to strip forces away from Kandahar province and send them over to Helmand province, where the British position was becoming tenuous. Was Mushan more important than Lashkar Gha, Sangin, or Arghandab? Somebody concluded that it was not and decided to close it. In the case of Mushan, there is no “spinning of the truth”-we just don’t want to tell the enemy what we are doing while we are going about doing it.

[***Dr. Sean M. Maloney***](http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://www.seanmmaloney.com/images/P2110194.png&imgrefurl=http://www.seanmmaloney.com/books/books5.html&usg=__sNRXviFWzXmhHQck9LdIJJJA2hw=&h=375&w=500&sz=88&hl=en&start=1&um=1&tbnid=ySKWZHF06uXF1M:&tbnh=98&tbnw=130&prev=/images%3Fq%3DPanjwayi%2BAlamo:%2BThe%2BDefence%2Bof%2BStrongpoint%2BMushan%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26hs%3DSZk%26sa%3DN%26um%3D1)*, Phd is the Canadian Army’s historian for the Afghanistan war and* [***Associate professor RMCC (detached)***](http://www.rmc.ca/aca/his/per/mal/index-eng.asp)*. For a detailed account of the Mushan battles, see “Panjwayi Alamo: The Defence of Strongpoint Mushan” in the Summer issue of* [***Canadian Military History.***](http://www.wlu.ca/lcmsds/cmh/cmhindex.html)