



A Canadian Military Presence in Afghanistan Post 2011

Conference of Defence Associations
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Executive Summary

The engagement of the Canadian Forces (CF) in Afghanistan since 2002 has resulted in a high cost in human lives and material resources. Until a few months ago, the size of the CF contingent in Kandahar Province made it impossible to secure significant amounts of territory for more than short periods of time. With the recent influx of American reinforcements, the gradual build-up of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and a reordering of the sectors of responsibility, a new concept of operations that combines a population-centric approach and accepted counterinsurgency techniques has been introduced in the province.

Canadians in Task Force Kandahar have had considerable early success in applying this so-called '*village approach*'. They *clear* an area of insurgents; *hold* the ground through a physical presence with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) units; and *build*, through the application of funding to local projects, to improve security and services and foster economic growth. Additionally, in its 'whole of government' approach to the Afghan mission, Canada has achieved some success in a continuity of effort among the departments and agencies involved,

notably Defence, Foreign Affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency, Correctional Service of Canada, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Overall, the focus has shifted from defeating the insurgents through military means to an approach where their ability to threaten, intimidate and recruit a vulnerable population will be dramatically reduced. But such an approach will take time to show widespread results. The 'accelerating surge' announced by US President Barack Obama will enable more rapid progress, but the desired outcome will not be achieved as early as July 2011, the date on which US forces are expected to begin withdrawal. Moreover, ultimate success is directly linked to the growth and competency of the ANSF (the army and police) and the ability of the national government to deal with corruption and governance issues.

In 2008, the Canadian parliament adopted a motion which states that, "*Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, and, as of that date, the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar and their replacement by Afghan forces start as soon as possible, so that it will have been completed by December 2011.*"



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The insistence by the Prime Minister and others that the military will withdraw in 2011 has effectively established a position that Canada will have by that time fulfilled its moral obligation to assist and that our national interest will not be further served by a continued military presence.

Canadians—politicians and voters alike—are influenced by the negative perceptions of the situation in Afghanistan. The iconic image of the mission has become the ramp ceremony, with little attention paid to the many successes being achieved on the ground.

There has been little informed debate in Canada on the strategic implications of the mission and its importance to security and stability in the region. As the 2011 departure deadline approaches, there is increased urgency to engage in a debate on the future of the mission. Identifying a 2011 deadline in early 2008 may have made sense with the information at hand at the time, but consideration should be given to what has happened since. While Canada may not have the resources necessary to maintain the same size of force currently in theatre post 2011, a total withdrawal would be a betrayal of our involvement to date.

The Conference of Defence Associations recommends that, without engaging in planned offensive operations, Canada continue to contribute to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011 by supporting development and providing training and mentoring assistance as well as other military support, such as the helicopter support Canada currently provides to Canadian and ISAF forces.

Canadians need to learn more about the successes being achieved in Afghanistan. They must come to realize that a vital Canadian national interest is at stake with the possibility of a major degradation of the security situation in the entire region if the ISAF mission were to fail or be abandoned. Specific action is needed now to address potential Canadian involvement in Afghanistan post 2011 to ensure that development work can continue—the ‘hold’ and ‘build’ elements of the approach being taken in counterinsurgency.

Accordingly, the Government is encouraged to establish a panel—like the one chaired by The Honourable John Manley in late 2007—to review the Afghan mission, to determine options for the future and recommend a way ahead.



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Background

The 9/11 attacks on the United States, Canada's most important neighbour and ally, are known to have had Al Qaeda origins, to have stemmed from terrorism cells in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to have raised the very real concern of the possible acquisition, by Al Qaeda operatives, of nuclear weapons. In a region of the world that counts five nuclear-armed countries (China, Israel, Russia, India and Pakistan), and putatively a sixth (Iran), a major war could result in a nuclear exchange. Canada's vital interests, and those of many other nations of the world, are at stake in the current struggle against Al Qaeda and their allies/affiliates, the Taliban, and other terrorist groups. Stabilization of this region is therefore essential to the interests of Canada and our allies.

Canada's military presence in Afghanistan since 2002 has resulted in a high cost in human lives and material resources. Currently, the men and women of the Canadian Forces (CF) are engaged in a very challenging mission against Taliban insurgents in that country's relatively unstable Kandahar Province. Until a few months ago, the size of the CF contingent made it impossible to secure significant amounts of territory in that province for more than short periods of time. With the influx of American reinforcements, the gradual build-up of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and a reapportioning of areas of responsibility,

Population-Centric Counterinsurgency

The formula for population or people-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) operations calls for separating the insurgents from the civilian population ('clearing'); protecting the citizens from insurgent menace as they return to their normal occupations ('holding'); and re-establishing the social, political and economic fabric of the nation ('building').

Canadians in Task Force Kandahar have had considerable success in adopting this 'clear, hold and build' approach at the sub-district and community levels. However, insufficient forces have prevented the application of this formula on a national, provincial or even, in Kandahar Province, on a district basis.

The 'village approach' is the expression used to describe COIN operations carried out in Kandahar Province at the sub-district and community levels. This approach brings to bear the effects of all three Canadian/ISAF 'lines of operation'—security, governance, and development—with the aim of directly benefiting the population in those areas where each of these is achievable. In essence, the idea is to secure areas that can be secured, begin development initiatives in these areas and thereby offer possibilities for the machinery of government to be set in motion. Although this method cannot be applied in all communities directly, its effects, seen and highly desired by others, can start to spread on their own. This has been the case in Kandahar since Canadians began employing the approach. It is proof to Afghans of Canada's good intentions and tangible evidence that, with expanded efforts by all parties, the insurgents can be made irrelevant, village by village.



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US General Stanley McChrystal, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) recently introduced a new concept of operations in the province.

In his Commander's Counterinsurgency (COIN) Guidance, the General stated: "*The Afghan people are the Objective. Protecting them is the mission. Focus 95% of your time building relationships with them and, together with the Afghan government, meeting their needs.*" Such a population-centric approach using accepted COIN techniques demands that things change for the better where people live and work. Achieving this requires good governance at all levels. The vacuum created by a lack of good governance is what, through violence, intimidation and anti-government propaganda, successful insurgencies exploit in order to gain power and leverage over the population.

In Afghanistan, the government is beset by problems related to a lack of capacity, ethnic and tribal diversity, corruption, narcotics and the cross-border nature of the insurgency. Only if it can achieve a level of good governance, and the stability that ensues, will it be able to defeat the insurgency.

Canadians in Task Force Kandahar have had considerable success in applying a population-centric 'clear, hold and build' approach in various villages, which now serve as models of what is achievable. That is, they *clear* an area of insurgents; *hold* the ground through a physical presence in conjunction with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) units; and *build*, through the application of funding to local projects, to improve security, furnish basic services and increase the potential for economic growth. Implementation of this approach, preceded by direct coordination (and gallons of tea) with village elders and Imams, ensures that *they* identify the

priorities which are most important to them and, as a result, buy into and have ownership of the solutions.

Canadians are considered leaders among the 43 coalition nations in Afghanistan in proving this concept and demonstrating its viability. The term 'village approach' has been commonly used to describe the concept and it has spread to eight or nine villages in the Canadian area of operations. In addition to those directly affected, other villages are taking notice and are asking for those same benefits to be extended to them.

In its 'whole of government' approach to the Afghan mission now emulated by many allies, Canada has achieved some success through a continuity of effort by the departments and agencies involved, notably Defence, Foreign Affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Correctional Service of Canada, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In the delivery of development support and humanitarian aid, for example, CIDA has invested in a number of large and small initiatives to promote health, education, and economic prosperity throughout the Province. At the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT), civilian and military personnel work together to deliver protection and assistance to the local area. As security and stability improves, the United Nations and other agencies, many of which are non-governmental, move in to augment and expand the support provided.

In addition to the obvious and essential protection provided to the Afghan people from Taliban intimidation, of immediate benefit are the opportunities for employment in development and aid projects. When such an alternative, legal and safer opportunity for earning an income is available, Afghans who have chosen to side with the Taliban are prone to putting down their weapons and adopting a more stable, secure lifestyle. As



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the recruitment pool for the Taliban is reduced and insurgency fighters become increasingly unwelcome in secure villages, the level of security in the region increases. Canadians currently employ more than 750 Afghans through the 'village approach'. The potential for more jobs is ever-increasing, and not just for the short term, given that development projects also seek to revive and establish a sustainable economy.

Under General McChrystal's direction, this new approach to COIN operations calls for a shift from defeating the insurgents through military means to an approach where their ability to threaten, intimidate and recruit a vulnerable population can be dramatically reduced. The additional reinforcements requested by General McChrystal and announced by US President Barack Obama make it possible for such an approach to expand and take firmer hold in areas not previously protected. But such an approach will take time to show widespread results. In their local area, Canadian leaders estimate that broad improvements should nevertheless start to show within another year of active engagement, while others caution that the desired outcome will not be achieved by July 2011, the date on which US forces are expected to begin withdrawing. Moreover, ultimate success is directly linked to the growth and competency of the ANSF (the army and police) and the ability of the national government to deal with corruption and governance issues.

CDA Position

In 2008 the Canadian parliament adopted a motion which states that:

"Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009, to July 2011, in a manner fully

consistent with the UN mandate on Afghanistan, and that the military mission shall consist of:

(a) training the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can expeditiously take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole;

(b) providing security for reconstruction and development efforts in Kandahar; and

(c) the continuation of Canada's responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team."

The motion further stated that, "the government of Canada notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, and, as of that date, the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar and their replacement by Afghan forces start as soon as possible, so that it will have been completed by December 2011."¹

These principles remain valid and significant progress is being made towards their achievement. With the increasing realization that a military confrontation against the Taliban is not a 'winnable' undertaking, the focus on a more concentrated approach to security and development is producing tangible results. Canada has invested a great deal in these results and will continue to do so until 2011.

Notwithstanding the open support which Canadians continue to express for members of the CF, enthusiasm for Canada's continued presence in Afghanistan is not supported by the

¹ The motion of 13 March 2008 is available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/ revised-motion-afghanistan.html>



majority. Much of this is due to expectations that more progress would have been made by now, after seven years. Canadian deaths, decreasing public support in other nations and the cost of sustaining a Canadian contingent all contribute to an argument for withdrawal.

The insistence by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and others that the military will withdraw in 2011 has effectively established a position that Canada will have by that time fulfilled its moral obligation to assist and that our national interest will not be further served by a continued military presence. The fact that President Obama has identified the same time period as the beginning of a US withdrawal reinforces for many Canadians the fact that the Canadian government has it right and that there is no justification for giving the military mission any further consideration.

Canadians—politicians and voters alike—are influenced greatly by the negative perceptions of the situation. The iconic image of the mission has become the ramp ceremony, with little attention paid to the many successes being achieved on the ground. Most media personnel in theatre seldom venture ‘outside the wire’ to report, first hand, these important achievements.

All too often, the good things that are happening are overshadowed by daily stories from Afghanistan about gains being made by the Taliban or by Canadian casualties. These stories, too, are largely misleading. Unlike their rapid advance to power in 1996, the Taliban now show little sign of military brilliance. Having been thwarted whenever they have faced ISAF forces directly, they now resort increasingly to using improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations, suicide bombings and terrorist threats against local citizens. Their hold on territory is tenuous at best and can be reversed.

Peacekeeping or Peacemaking?

Traditional peacekeeping is the employment of military in keeping formerly warring armed forces from fighting. Armed force is limited to self-defence. Despite what many may think or wish ISAF troops are doing in Afghanistan, it is not a peacekeeping mission. There is no peace to keep with the ongoing insurgency. Accordingly, troops must have a robust combat capability and appropriate rules of engagement to effectively perform their mission.

However, the concept of protecting the population in order that development can take place with some certainty of long term success is consistent with what Canadians believe in. The CF are well trained and well equipped to continue this mission.

More importantly, perhaps, there has been little informed debate in Canada on the strategic implications of the mission and its importance to security and stability in the region. The disproportionate amount of attention recently given to the transfer of detainees to Afghan authorities in 2006 and 2007, albeit a legitimate concern, only serves to deflect the public’s attention away from the larger ‘here and now’ issues, and almost totally ignores the very real progress that is being made, largely through Canadian initiatives.

As the withdrawal deadline approaches, there is an urgent need to engage in a debate on the future of the mission. Identifying a 2011 deadline in early 2008 may have made sense given the information at hand at the time, but consideration should now be given to what has happened in the intervening period.

As a member of NATO, Canada remains committed to Afghanistan, to the terms of the Afghan Compact of February 2006, and to the ISAF mission. While Canada may not have the resources necessary to maintain the same size of force currently in theatre post 2011, a total withdrawal would be a betrayal of our



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involvement to date. It would largely wipe out the credit and influence that Canada and Canadians—civilian and military alike—have earned through our significant contribution to date. Canada's international stature has risen immensely because of our work in Afghanistan, but it will be seriously diminished unless Canadians reverse the current course of total military withdrawal.

The fact that Canadian military personnel themselves firmly believe in the mission is important. They are the ones making the sacrifices and they are the ones who witness the successes. They are committed to carrying out their mandated mission to the best of their ability to the very last day of their rotation. They are building the momentum to turn the country around after three decades of war and insecurity. They recognize that they alone cannot win against the insurgents. They also know that there will be no victory without the military. During their time in power, the Taliban built no roads, no schools, and no health care centres. Because of the protection and assistance provided by the military, the Afghan people are beginning to see progress in these areas, and it is important that the gains established at great cost are not abandoned.

Having said this, the Conference of Defence Associations readily accepts that the size of the Canadian contingent in Afghanistan is probably beyond what the CF can sustain indefinitely. Indeed, full support of the mission to the projected withdrawal date in 2011 will demand no less than the same ongoing commitment that has been so important to the successes achieved to date.

But Canada can continue to do more in Afghanistan beyond 2011 without engaging in offensive operations. Development assistance is all-important to the future of the Afghan people. We need to exploit the gains already made through

"To paraphrase Winston Churchill, I don't think this is the end. I don't even think it's the beginning of the end. But I do believe it's the end of the beginning."

General McChrystal as quoted in the *Washington Post*, Wednesday, December 2, 2009

the application of the 'village approach' and continue with development work via the well-located, effective and mature KPRT. We need to follow through with the all-important effort of training and mentoring ANSF personnel in order to enable them to assume ever-greater responsibility for security and protection of the population. These activities will necessitate at least some form of military presence for years to come.

By withdrawing all its military personnel in 2011, Canada risks losing its well-earned status and influence within NATO and jeopardizing the progress and benefits already achieved for the people of Afghanistan. By focusing on development and on building national institutions, Canada should choose to provide a military force smaller than the one currently in theatre and whose mission would be the provision of security and the training of the ANSF.

The Government should also consider maintaining those services it currently provides to Canadian and ISAF forces—airlift, helicopter support, manned air surveillance and reconnaissance, UAV surveillance, artillery support, hospital care, etc. These services are vital to the overall mission and should not be discounted, in consideration of those activities that may well endure beyond 2011. Such support comes at a cost, but it is essential to the viability of this multinational mission.

Conclusion

The Taliban were removed from power in 2001 because they allowed Al



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Qaeda to operate unfettered on Afghan territory, one result of which was the horror of 9/11. If Afghanistan were allowed once again to come under Taliban control, the consequences would be severe. A civil war might very well result, one which the Taliban would likely win. This, of course, would in turn place Pakistan in great jeopardy; possibly result in the fall of that country to jihadist elements; and lead to the frightening prospect of a terrorist government having legal possession of many nuclear weapons.

To avoid any possibility of this nightmare scenario, ISAF must stay the course in Afghanistan, especially at a time when substantial progress is being made. The addition of 30,000 American personnel, and more from other coalition partners, presents an opportunity to exploit the situation over the next eighteen months and establish a 'beachhead' of stability for a secure and prosperous Afghanistan. During that period, and during the continuing effort after 2011, Canada must be a part of the process, not an observer.

Success will eventually be achieved in Afghanistan, and Canada should continue to contribute to achieving that success. This means that the federal government must reverse its policy of silence on the question and show real leadership. Opposition parties must discard partisanship in favour of the national interest in such a way that Parliament can reverse the artificial 2011 deadline and seriously consider the options that are available. The media must exercise their enormous influence to inform our citizens of the real issues, and Canadians themselves need to think beyond their own discomfort over casualties and the belief that this is someone else's war.

It is time for Canadians to wake up to the reality of Afghanistan. The

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Canadians need to learn more about the successes being achieved in Afghanistan. They must come to realize that our military presence in that country is not purely about aiding a nation that desperately needs our help, important as that may be. There is also a vital Canadian national interest at stake about which most Canadians seem blissfully unaware.

Accordingly, the Government is encouraged to establish a panel, not unlike that which was led by The Honourable John Manley in late 2007, to review the Afghan mission, to determine options for the future and recommend a way ahead. Through non-partisan, objective evaluation of the current circumstances and how they have changed since the 2011 deadline was fixed, a balanced approach to Canada's future in Afghanistan can be considered—one that exploits the 'investment' to date and responds to Canadian interests for the future.

The Conference of Defence Associations
222 Somerset St., Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2P 2G3
Telephone : (613) 236-1252
Facsimile : (613) 236-8191
E-mail : cda@cda-cdai.ca
Web: www.cda-cdai.ca

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