

CANADA AND THE AFGHANISTAN LEGACY

Introduction

Focus

As Canada prepares to transition from combatant to trainer in Afghanistan, we look back at the history of the nine-year Afghan mission and its legacy; both in Afghanistan and here at home.

When Canada first sent soldiers to Afghanistan in 2002, few Canadians would have believed we would still have forces there in 2011. The mission was to be a simple one: help establish a democratic government capable of governing successfully—and leave.

Unfortunately things did not go as planned. Afghanistan remains unstable, and it is doubtful that peace will exist in the country in the foreseeable future. As well, it is uncertain whether a democratic government—at least the way we think of it—will be in operation in the country.

Leaving has proven to be extremely difficult. Canada has been drawn into its most costly military action since the Korean War, both in money and in lives lost. It has also been the country's longest military action.

From the beginning, the mission was controversial, opposed by two political parties—the NDP and the Bloc Québécois—as well as many ordinary citizens. As the conflict escalated and the number of casualties increased, popular support decreased. Nonetheless, a date for withdrawal was postponed, first to 2009, then to 2011.

By October 2010 one poll reported that 66 per cent of Canadians would oppose or “somewhat oppose” another mission like the one in Afghanistan. Only 21 per cent said they would support or “somewhat support” a similar one (*The Globe and Mail*, October 25, 2010).

In the summer of 2011, Canada will begin withdrawing its forces. Nearly 1 000 military personnel will remain

behind to train members of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. They will not be participating in military campaigns and will be assigned to some of the less dangerous parts of a very dangerous country. But no matter where one is in Afghanistan, the possibility of an attack by insurgents remains very real.

This, in brief, is the story of Afghanistan. After 10 years of international political, economic, and military assistance, large portions of the country remain outside government control. The government itself is acknowledged by the international community to be corrupt; the military and police are often incompetent, frequently unreliable, and loathed by large numbers of their countrymen.

Did Canada's Afghan mission accomplish anything? The country remains a long way from the kind of stability we had hoped to provide when we undertook the mission. Most observers believe that the best the international community can hope for are talks to bring all sides in the conflict together to share power in the government. Right now those talks remain elusive.

Nevertheless, Canada can be proud of at least two things: its continued commitment to human rights around the world and a better life for the people of Afghanistan; and the men and women of the Canadian Forces, who have bravely demonstrated that commitment on our behalf.

To Consider

It has been a very long mission for Canada's relatively small army. Should Canada maintain a military presence in Afghanistan, even in a training role? Might its presence be more useful elsewhere? Why or why not?

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Video Review

Further Research

Learn more about Canada's mission in Afghanistan by visiting the Government of Canada Web site at www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/news-nouvelles/2010/2010_07_09.aspx?lang=eng.

Pre-viewing Activity

Several recent opinion polls have indicated that a majority of Canadians would prefer that the Canadian military only participate in peacekeeping missions in future and avoid actual combat missions like the one in Afghanistan. Before watching the video, take a poll of the class on their view of peacekeeping missions versus combat missions.

1. How many people voted for peacekeeping over combat missions, and how many voted against?

2. Record three of the reasons you heard students express to explain their position.

3. What is your own position on this issue? Make sure you provide a reason for your position.

Viewing Questions

Respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. How many Canadian soldiers are being withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2011?

2. How many will remain as part of a training mission?

3. How many Canadian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan?

4. Why did the Canadian Forces abandon Zangabad in 2008?

5. What change will the surge in U.S. troops bring to that area?

6. Canadians repaired a school in Salavat. Why has it remained empty?

7. Hamdullah Nazak, district governor of Dand, says all that people really want is one thing. What is it?

8. What percentage of Canadian soldiers who have fought in Afghanistan return with mental health problems?

9. What change in the domestic violence rate took place in Camp Petawawa between 2006 and 2010, after soldiers returned from Afghanistan?

10. What relationship have studies in the United States shown between post-traumatic stress disorder and domestic violence?

Post-viewing Activities

1. a) Poll the class again on their view of peacekeeping missions versus combat missions. How many changed their opinions after watching the video?

b) Why might that be?

2. The U.S. troop surge in 2010 ended an ongoing cycle of Canadian troops taking military targets only to have to abandon them and see them retaken by the insurgents. How would you answer Susan Ormiston's question from the video: "What does that say about the four years that we've been in this area and around here?"

3. Do you agree with Brigadier-General Dean Miller that Canada's Afghan experience has been well worth the sacrifice? Why or why not?

4. What should be the responsibility of the military in dealing with domestic violence in military families? Is it any different from civil society's general responsibility to deal with the problem? Why or why not?

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The Mission

Definition

The term *friendly fire* is used to describe an incident where an army accidentally fires on its own forces while attempting to engage enemy forces.

Further Research

National Defence and Canadian Forces official Web site for Operation Athena is www.cefcom-comfec.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/ops/athena/index-eng.asp.

Focus for Reading

In 2011 Canada marks its 10th year of combat in Afghanistan. As you read this section of the guide, create a timeline listing by date the major events and high points of Canadian involvement in the Afghan mission.

Canada's involvement in the Afghan conflict began shortly after the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Canada dispatched a naval task force to the Persian Gulf in October, and ground troops were sent to take part in an international operation. The mission was expected to last until October 2003.

The first troops arrived in February 2002—a regiment from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. The aim was to assist the international force in an offensive in southern Afghanistan against the Taliban—insurgents who had been running the country with violence—and Al Qaeda rebels.

Shortly after their arrival, in April 2002, a friendly-fire incident resulted in the death of four Canadian soldiers and the wounding of eight others. An American pilot mistook the group for insurgents and dropped a laser-guided bomb on them.

Operation Athena

In August 2003 Canadian troops began Operation Athena—which expanded the forces' role in the conflict. Canadian troops were first based in Kabul as part of the International Security Assistance Force. The aim of their operation was to provide security to help rebuild democracy in Afghanistan leading up to elections in the fall of 2005. During this period, the number of Canadian troops in Afghanistan climbed from 600 to 1 200.

By 2006 Canadians were assigned to southern Afghanistan, a very dangerous part of the country. It was during this

period that NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) troops took command of all the military operations in the south. NATO sent a total of about 8 000 soldiers to six southern provinces, including a Canadian force of about 2 300 based around Kandahar.

From May to October 2006 Canada was involved in a major anti-Taliban offensive called Operation Medusa. This period is often described as the Taliban Resurgence, when 1 500 to 2 000 Taliban fighters flooded into the area around Panjwaii, determined to push out the international forces they considered to be invaders.

It took weeks of fierce fighting for Canadians to clear the district; and, once they left an area, the Taliban usually reappeared immediately to reassert their control. The fighting resulted in a high number of casualties, which had the effect of sharpening the debate at home on Canada's role in Afghanistan.

In 2007 Canada altered its approach to work more closely with the Afghan National Army (ANA). Once an area was cleared of insurgents, the ANA and Afghan National Police were given increased responsibility for holding that area.

Provincial Reconstruction Team

Canadians were not just involved in combat during this time. Canada was also part of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Personnel from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), the RCMP, and Foreign Affairs joined with the military to assist with

Quote

"An immediate military withdrawal from Afghanistan would cause more harm than good."

— The Manley Report on Canada in Afghanistan, January 2008

security, training, and reconstruction. Canada was now investing heavily in Afghanistan. Before 2001, Canada provided about \$10-million a year in humanitarian aid to the country. Between 2001 and 2007 aid to Afghanistan amounted to \$741-million, making the country the largest recipient of financial aid from Canada.

Canada has also been involved in many different development projects in Afghanistan. These include a campaign to eradicate polio; efforts to improve the educational system, especially for females; and the refurbishment of the Dhala Dam and irrigation system in Kandahar.

Stay or Go?

With public opinion polls showing steadily decreasing support for the Afghan mission among Canadians, the government decided to appoint an independent panel to recommend whether the country should pull out of Afghanistan when its commitment ended in February 2009 or expand that commitment until 2011. The panel was headed by former Liberal deputy leader John Manley.

The Manley panel argued that Afghanistan's new government was not ready to assume full control and recommended that Canada stay at least through 2011—but not unconditionally. If Canada were to stay in Kandahar, it indicated that the following assistance was required:

- An additional battle group of about 1 000 soldiers needed to be assigned to Kandahar by NATO and/or other allies before February 2009.
- The government needed to secure new, medium-lift helicopters and high-performance unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance before that date.

The non-binding report also

said that Canada's role must place greater emphasis on diplomacy and reconstruction, and that the Canadian military focus must shift gradually from combat to training Afghan national security forces.

Shortly after receiving the Manley report, the government introduced a motion in the House of Commons to renew Canada's Afghan mission, with a focus on reconstruction and training. Prime Minister Stephen Harper also announced a firm pullout date that would see almost all Canadian troops out of Afghanistan by December 2011. The motion was opposed by both the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, but easily passed with the support of the Liberals.

So Canada remained in Afghanistan. In 2010 it received enormous assistance from a U.S. troop surge, which allotted 17 000 new troops to the NATO forces in Afghanistan. One-third of those troops were stationed in Kandahar.

The Future

The final Canadian troop rotation, the 10th, began on November 27, 2010. Withdrawal will take place no later than July 2011. But this will not be the end of the Canadian Forces' involvement in Afghanistan.

Under considerable pressure from the United States and other NATO allies, the government has agreed to provide training for members of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. About 950 members of the Canadian Forces will remain in Afghanistan, transferred from the ISAF to the NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan. They will be stationed behind the wire—that is, in relatively safe areas of the country—and will not take part in combat missions.

This phase of Canada's Afghan mission is scheduled to end in early 2014.

The Price

Canada has paid a high price in human life for its participation in the Afghan conflict. As of May 2011, there have been 155 soldiers, four civilians, and one foreign affairs officer killed during the mission.

Of the 155 soldiers killed, 123 were killed in hostile circumstances (95 of these by improvised explosive devices); 21 by small arms, rocket-propelled grenades or mortar fire; 11 by suicide

bombers; and one in a fall during a fire fight. Twenty-two others died in accidents, including seven killed by friendly fire.

Canada has the third-highest number of deaths among the nations participating in the NATO mission. On a per capita basis, it has the highest number of deaths of all the coalition members.

As you will learn in the section of this guide titled “The Impact,” many others have also paid a high price.

Follow-up

1. What are some of the reasons why the Canadian government would view a “whole-of-government” approach as critical to the success of the Afghan mission?
2. How can we assess the cost of the Afghanistan mission?
3. How can we assess the benefits of the Afghanistan mission?
4. Compare the timeline you created with one of your classmate’s timelines. Add any important information that you feel you missed in your own work.

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The Withdrawal

Further Research

The CBC is an excellent online source for information on the Afghanistan mission. Visit www.cbc.ca and type "Afghanistan" into the search field.

Focus for Reading

As the date for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan approached, a great deal of domestic and international pressure was put on the Canadian government to reconsider its position. Ultimately, the government decided to withdraw its main fighting force but leave a contingent behind, mostly in Kabul, to train the army and police force. Below you will find some of the voices that contributed to the debate. As you read the quotes, identify one that you most agree with and one you most disagree with.

"The bad thing is that no one can explain what, exactly, we think we'll achieve, or how we'll achieve it . . . As for the police, let's just say that many people fear them more than they fear the Taliban. (Actually, because of infiltration, some of the police are the Taliban.)" — Margaret Wente (*The Globe and Mail*, November 18, 2010)

"Whatever mix the Conservative government settles on, Canadian policy-makers should send a credible signal that we will not forsake Afghan President Hamid Karzai's government. With our allies, we must challenge the Taliban view that they can wait us out. In Kabul last week, many of the key figures in Afghan society delivered a strikingly similar message." — Editorial (*Toronto Star*, October 4, 2010)

"Harper flip-flops—won't cut and run; won't stay a day longer than July 2011; okay, will stay until 2014—are functions of political posturing. Ignatieff's position springs from his written conviction that the Afghan war was essential to Pax Americana, Empire Lite. Regardless of motivation, Harper and Ignatieff are the eager errand boys of America in Afghanistan." — Haroon Siddiqui (*Toronto Star*, November 25, 2010)

"Those of us in Western civilization want our gratification in nice neat packages, like the end of the Second World War. We won't have a day of victory in Afghanistan. It's going to take a generation." — Frederick McKay, father of Pvt. Kevin McKay, killed in Afghanistan (*Toronto Star*, October 5, 2010)

"It doesn't matter how capable our army is. They still need more training and resupply. Canadians have done a great job with mentorship and resupply. But our army is young. In this short period of time, we've had a lot of success. We are still in extreme need of Canadian help." — Afghan Brigadier General Ahmad Abibi (*Toronto Star*, October 25, 2010)

"Every year, one in five soldiers walks out of the Afghan National Army for good. How many of these become Taliban fighters, taking their training and weapons with them? You think you're training government officers, but then you're really training insurgents as well." — Jack Layton (*The Globe and Mail*, January 15, 2011)

"Parliament has already adopted a resolution that expressly supports the training mission beyond July, 2011. That resolution of March 2008 called for an end only to Canada's presence in Kandahar. It went to say that Canada, with its allies, including

Afghanistan, ‘must set firm targets and timelines for the training, equipping, and paying of the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, the members of the judicial system, and the members of the correctional system.’ The Canadian government’s decision to stay in Afghanistan to train soldiers is entirely consistent with that resolution. For quite a while now, Mr. Harper has given the public the impression that Canada’s military would be leaving the country entirely. But there is nothing in the resolution’s letter or spirit to suggest that. The Canadian military can continue to share the expertise it gained in fighting an insurgency, without exposing itself to the chronic dangers of the Kandahar mission. With a parliamentary mandate already in place, it should be directed to press on.” — Editorial (*The Globe and Mail* November 13, 2010)

But no one was more bitter than Thomas Walkom, who summed up the course of the war and its results in his column. Noting that the Karzai government was holding exploratory talks with some Taliban leaders, he wrote: “Americans are ready to countenance a deal that would see the Taliban reinvolved in Afghanistan’s government. Nine years of constant war have accomplished virtually nothing. The NATO foreigners are on their way out. The Taliban are on their way back. Sometimes the bad guys do win.” — Thomas Walkom (*Toronto Star*, October 23, 2010)

For Discussion

When it comes to criticism of the international mission to Afghanistan, Thomas Walkom’s comment is particularly damning. Do you agree with his view that, if the Taliban are included in an Afghan unity government, the Afghan mission will have accomplished nothing? Why or why not?

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The Impact

 Canada's Afghanistan mission has had a number of consequences, some intended, others unintended. This section of the guide explores only some of those consequences. As you read through the section, use the Cause and Consequence Worksheet 2: Multiple Consequence Web document (available at <http://newsinreview.cbclearning.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/nir-sw2-multiple-consequences2.pdf>) to identify those consequences.

Canada's participation in the NATO action in Afghanistan has had consequences felt both there and here at home.

In Afghanistan

Canada went to Afghanistan to support and stabilize the Afghan government after years of Taliban rule. Thanks to NATO, the government of Hamid Karzai has survived, but not all of NATO's aims have been met. Karzai's government, while in some ways more respectful of human rights than its Taliban predecessor, is widely held by foreign and domestic observers to be corrupt at its very core. Few people believe that the Karzai government will be able to survive without NATO's assistance. Karzai himself recognizes this and has recently attempted to begin negotiations with Taliban leaders to bring them into a power-sharing arrangement. Karzai has made such an arrangement dependent on the Taliban laying down its weapons.

But NATO expected far more from the Afghans when it undertook its support of the government. In addition to military activity, Canada and its allies have been supporting and encouraging social and economic transformation. Especially important to Canada was the issue of greater rights for Afghan women. Under the Taliban regime women had virtually no rights whatsoever.

Until 2009 neither Canada nor the United States supported talks with the

Taliban. But after years of frustration with failure to decisively defeat them, both countries began to view such talks as crucial to being able to leave Afghanistan with some type of stability. Prime Minister Harper has encouraged attempts to reach an agreement but only if the Taliban agree to respect the Afghan constitution and all of its human rights guarantees: "Any agreement along those lines is something Canada would strongly support" (*The Globe and Mail*, October 30, 2010).

Public opinion on the presence of NATO and Canada in Afghanistan is divided. The majority of Afghans would like to see the foreign soldiers leave. But many also fear that, when NATO does go, the country will revert to tribal warfare and repressive regimes.

Beyond Afghan borders, the NATO action is viewed with dismay by many Muslim countries and has increased anti-Western feelings. Some governments—including those of Pakistan and Iran—and official Muslim organizations have gone out of their way to lend support to the Taliban.

The result of NATO's lengthy military mission may prove to be some return to power of the Taliban—but this time with the international recognition it failed to obtain when it previously formed the government. Many observers question how secure this will leave the human rights that Canada fought so hard to promote.

The Canadian Military

Canada's military went into Afghanistan knowing that there would be casualties but believing the situation in Afghanistan justified military intervention. For Canada the war has been extremely difficult, and the casualties have been significant.

What the Afghan mission has done, however, is prepare our soldiers for a new kind of warfare—one that is likely to become more common in the future, and one for which Canadian forces are now especially suited. As Campbell Clark wrote in *The Globe and Mail* (October 23, 2010): “Canada's military will leave Afghanistan with a bitter taste in its mouth about the scope and scale of what it can accomplish, but it has evolved into something in critical short supply: a force that can deliver a few thousand troops, able to help lash together multi-national contingents and confront the low-tech insurgencies, warlords, and rebel groups that are the new, vexing face of conflict in the world.”

Because of its valiant efforts in Afghanistan, and thanks to its willingness to remain until 2014 in a training capacity, Canada's military has won the respect of the United States and its NATO allies. Until Afghanistan, Canada's soldiers were viewed internationally as competent peacekeepers rather than accomplished warriors. That perception changed with this conflict.

Canada's training role also means that about 1 000 soldiers (and police) will remain in Afghanistan, supposedly in relative safety behind the wire. That is, they will not participate in military actions unless they are attacked in their compounds. Nevertheless, the dangers, while reduced, remain very real. Canadians should anticipate further casualties until the mission finally

concludes in March 2014. Training in Afghanistan will also reduce the number of military personnel available for other duties both at home and abroad.

Military Casualties

Over 150 members of the Canadian military have been killed in the Afghan conflict. But equally noteworthy are the numbers who have been injured and survived. The injuries have been both physical and mental—and both have deep and long-lasting consequences.

As of December 2009, 529 Canadians had been wounded in battles in Afghanistan, and another 913 had suffered non-battle injuries. One of the surprises of the Afghan campaign has been the number of soldiers who survived truly catastrophic injuries, thanks to dramatic improvements in battlefield medical care. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—the enemy weapon of choice—have been responsible for some of the worst injuries as well as the majority of Canadian deaths.

As a result, soldiers returning to Canada with injuries—double amputations for example—would not likely have survived even 10 years ago. About 100 have been deemed to be fully disabled. Many of them are reporting great difficulty in obtaining sufficient rehabilitation support once they return home. Also contentious is the compensation that disabled soldiers receive.

In 2006, the Canadian government enacted a New Veterans Charter that changed the terms of compensation for disabled members of the military. A lifetime pension was replaced with a one-time lump-sum payment with a maximum amount of just over \$276 000. Many of the disabled feel that they are receiving less money in comparison with the older pension system.

Further Research

Information on the New Veterans Charter is available online at www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/sub.cfm?source=services/benefits/nvc.

Mental Health Problems

It is estimated that one out of every four soldiers returning to Canada from Afghanistan returns with a mental health problem. The breakdown: 7 per cent suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 4.5 per cent with anxiety, and 13 per cent with depression.

Instances of PTSD seem to be on the increase. PTSD is caused by the threat—or even the viewing—of death or serious injury. A person with PTSD suffers from fear, a feeling of helplessness, exhaustively reliving the event in their head, emotional numbness, and changes in sleep habits.

Many soldiers with PTSD have difficulty finding programs that can really assist them with their condition. Many require residential treatment programs—but they cannot gain access to them if they have anger management issues, suffer from addiction, or have

recently attempted suicide. These are all problems that many combat soldiers are plagued with. In fact, the suicide rate in the military doubled between 2006 and 2007, and is triple the rate among the general public.

PTSD also has an impact on soldiers' families. A U.S. study indicates that PTSD increases the risk of domestic violence by about four times the average. Domestic violence has been on the increase on military bases that are home to soldiers returning from Afghanistan. A report on PTSD and domestic violence by members of the military recommended increased psychological services be made available, but the report and its recommendations were shelved. Meanwhile, local police reported that the number of domestic violence calls they responded to at one base, Camp Petawawa, increased from 118 in 2006 to 219 in 2010.

Analysis

1. These are just some of the consequences and results of the Afghan mission. Can you think of any other ways—economic and political, for example—in which the war has impacted Canadians? Add these to your Multiple Consequence Web.
2. Respond to the two questions under “Analysis” on the Multiple Consequence Web.
3. Canada has an unusual policy of releasing figures on military casualties only once a year so that public opinion over the military conflict doesn't get even more negative. Critics argue that this makes them “hidden casualties of war” and that most Canadians are, as a result, unaware of the real costs of the conflict. Do you agree with this policy? Explain your position.

