

# Research Package #3

(Junior High School – Policy Debate)



**“THBT Canada’s military should remain in Afghanistan beyond 2011.”**

**(Cross-Examination Policy Debate)**

**Regional and Provincial Topic (Feb/Mar) 2009-2010**



THE ARTICLES HERE HAVE BEEN EDITED, REPHRASED & ANNOTATED

# RESEARCH

This Research booklet is not complete. It is only an overview of information and debaters will use this booklet as a basis for their thinking and move on to other ideas and research. As well, the best foundation for any research into a topic begins with some basic reading on the ideas. If you wish, you can follow this with an interview with someone who is knowledgeable, can suggest ideas and can direct you to other ideas and research. Although you cannot quote this person unless he/she is published in print or on video, a human being can always explain issues better than an article.

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## THE CASE FOR CANADA'S MILITARY TO REMAIN IN AFGHANISTAN

### 1. Security for Canadians

The mission in Afghanistan started in 2002 was because the Taliban was in control of governments and the country was harboring terrorists after the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. The instability of the government in the country caused a significant security threat to all developed countries that were potential targets for terrorist groups based there. One argument to keep troops in Afghanistan beyond 2011 is for that very reason. If we pull out, there is a chance that extremists will regain power and Afghanistan will once again become a safe haven for potential terrorists. This would threaten the safety of Europe, the United States, and potentially Canada as well. The following is an official statement of Canada's role in Afghanistan:

Canada is in Afghanistan at the request of the democratically elected government and as part of a UN-mandate, NATO-led effort of over 40 nations in ISAF. Our goal is to protect Canadians by ensuring that Afghanistan never again falls into the hands of the Taliban and that Afghanistan becomes a stable, free and democratic society. Canada and Afghanistan, along with our international Allies, are partners in the Afghanistan Compact, an integrated plan that sets out five-year objectives and the benchmarks to measure our progress toward achieving them. These goals—which include a 20 percent increase in the employment of women, a 70 percent reduction of areas contaminated by landmines, and the development of a national army and police force—will help bring stability and peace to the lives of Afghans.

Afghanistan is not, nor has it ever been, a traditional peacekeeping mission. There are no ceasefire agreements to enforce and no negotiated peace settlement to respect, since neither the Taliban nor al-Qaeda is interested in the kind of peace that is acceptable to the Afghan people. The insurgents' objective is to force their will by undermining the legitimacy of the central government and its international partners. Insurgent attacks against civilians and military personnel have resulted in both Canadian and Afghan casualties.

As a fledgling democracy facing these struggles, Afghanistan still requires an international military presence in order to move the Afghanistan Compact forward, and to consolidate and

extend the government's authority throughout the country. Canada is proud to play a part in this effort by contributing to the UN-authorized and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

Canada strongly supports NATO's leadership of ISAF in Afghanistan and currently has approximately 2,500 Canadian Forces personnel deployed in support of operations there.

ISAF expansion beyond Kabul began through the establishment of mixed military and civilian Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in key provinces throughout Afghanistan.

Canada is the lead nation for a PRT in Kandahar. The Canadian PRT brings together military, civilian police, diplomats and development experts in an integrated Canadian effort to assist the Afghan government in extending its authority and legitimacy to Kandahar.

NATO is a key component of the international community's engagement in Afghanistan, assisting the Afghan authorities in providing security and stability, paving the way for reconstruction and effective governance.

Canada's participation is guided by our core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, especially the rights of women and girls. Because of our efforts, the Afghan people now vote, women and girls have rights and children are going to school. Rebuilding a shattered state, however, is a slow and complex process in a country that is emerging from more than two decades of oppression, terror, conflict, drought and poverty.

For more information on Canada's broad engagement in Afghanistan please refer to [Rebuilding Afghanistan](#)

[http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/nato-otan/afghanistan.aspx?menu\\_id=44&menu=R](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/nato-otan/afghanistan.aspx?menu_id=44&menu=R)

## **NATO: Canada Should Stay In Afghanistan**

### *Secretary-General Wants 2011 Date Extended*

Canadian troops have been a major part of the NATO (North Atlantic Trade Organization) combat mission since 2001. On a recent trip, Canadian Defense Minister Peter MacKay hinted at an extension of the mission, but not without Parliamentary support.

### Why Canada Should Stay: Security

Rasmussen visited a Canadian Aid project and praised the country for its contribution. In remarks published on *CBC.CA* he said: "I would like to take this opportunity to express my strong appreciation to the significant contribution to our mission in Afghanistan."

He continued arguing the reason Canada should stay is security. Afghanistan is thousands of kilometers away from Europe and is widely viewed as a haven for terrorists. Rasmussen emphasized that point in comments published by *theglobeandmail.com*: "At the end of the day it is a question of our own security- we cannot allow Afghanistan to once again become a safe

haven to terrorists- and I also think it is in Canada's best interest to ensure a peaceful and safe Afghanistan."

Since the mission began NATO has had 65,000 troops from 42 member nations. Canada has 2800 soldiers serving in southern Afghanistan. Rasmussen met with Afghan government officials including President Hamid Karazi, completely assuring him he had the alliance's support as long as needed.

### Federal Government Reacts To Rasmussen Comments

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon reacted on behalf of the federal government. In a statement published on *CTV.CA* he said Rasmussen's comments recognized Canada's contribution in Kandahar adding: "However our government is abiding by the motion passed in Parliament in 2008. That is: our combat forces will leave by 2011. We're staying the course." This backs Defense Minister MacKay's previous remarks that his government would respect the will of Parliament.

Read more at Suite101: [NATO: Canada Should Stay In Afghanistan: Secretary-General Wants 2011 Date Extended](http://canadian-foreign-affairs.suite101.com/article.cfm/nato_canada_should_stay_in_afghanistan#ixzz0coDsGNyN) [http://canadian-foreign-affairs.suite101.com/article.cfm/nato\\_canada\\_should\\_stay\\_in\\_afghanistan](http://canadian-foreign-affairs.suite101.com/article.cfm/nato_canada_should_stay_in_afghanistan)

## 2. Finish What We Started

Some believe that pulling the NATO armies out of Afghanistan in 2011 will undo any progress that was made in the past eight years. The democratically elected government may not be able to maintain order and control without foreign troops. If they cannot maintain control, power in the country could return to the Taliban. The result could be that all of the time, resources, and lives that we have sacrificed would have been wasted. Leaving in 2011 is a political decision in Canada that doesn't take into account the consequences for Afghanistan. Below is an article that warns against pulling out too early:

### Canada's Afghan Mission

They're pulling up the tent pegs on Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, slated to end in July, 2011.

But some critics are looking down the road at what comes next, and finding a big question mark. They say the government is leading from the rear, without taking the time for a wide-ranging debate on how – and even when – the troops should leave. They worry that the most important reasons for Canada's participation in the lengthy war may be left behind.

"The military is doing what it's been asked to do, preparing to go," says Douglas Bland, a professor of political studies at Queen's University and an expert on the Canadian military.

"But nobody has analyzed the consequences of leaving. We're just walking away."

With dire news from the Afghan front arriving daily – six more NATO soldiers were killed Monday – many Canadians are eager to see the end of a campaign they believe is too costly in lives and dollars.

But, Bland argues, "what we're doing now is trying to drive the policy process backwards. We've decided when the end is, so we're seeing how we can end up with the date being a rational one."

International debate will flare at the end of this month when British Prime Minister Gordon Brown hosts a 68-nation conference on Afghanistan's security and future.

But in Canada, Afghanistan is a radioactive issue, sending politicians scurrying for cover – a sign, Bland says, that leadership has failed.

He calls for scrutiny of issues including how Afghanistan affects Canada's future relations with the U.S., NATO and the United Nations, as well as Ottawa's international reputation.

Equally important, he says, is whether Canada's withdrawal will further fuel the Taliban insurgency and weaken an already fragile Afghan government.

If Afghanistan's people matter to Canadians, he said, the government should be able to explain how they will be affected by the end of the Canadian mission.

"The indicators should be the security and well-being of Afghans. If they believe those are improving we should reinforce that by protecting teachers, doctors and others who are helping to improve their welfare."

In a poll released this week by BBC, ABC News and Germany's ARD, Afghans' optimism about the future has dramatically escalated since one year ago, with 71 per cent of those questioned saying they expected their situation to improve, and 90 per cent favouring President Hamid Karzai's government to run the country – while only 6 per cent back the Taliban. In December 2008, just 40 per cent believed Afghanistan was moving in the right direction.

The survey of 1,500 Afghans was done in all of the country's 34 provinces in December 2009.

Rachel Rowell, head of advocacy for CARE International in Afghanistan, said the most important questions for the troubled country's future focus on the West's long-term engagement.

"That is more important than security," she said in an interview from Kabul. "Our own security is community acceptance, which we've built over 15 years. Right now what we need to know is exactly what is meant by withdrawal."

Mark Sedra, an Afghanistan expert at the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo, Ont., says the Afghan government could face a crisis of confidence as the Western troops leave.

"It won't have the capability to pay for the majority of its budget for some time yet. ... Some level of international assistance will be needed for the foreseeable future."

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/afghanmission/article/749501--canadian-troops-will-leave-afghanistan-and-then-what>

### **3. Supporting Democracy/Human Rights**

Some claim that countries with liberal democracies are much less likely to go to war with each other, and therefore it is important to support and develop liberal democracies all over the world to achieve peace. Further, human rights are often ignored in places where there are totalitarian or otherwise non-democratic governments. This is an article from 2007 supporting keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Many of the same arguments can be made to keep troops in Afghanistan longer now. In particular, there is an appeal to Canadian sentiment to protect those who suffer under totalitarian regimes:

Canada Should Stay in Afghanistan, Despite the Costs

By David Kilgour

Embassy Magazine, Ottawa, July 4, 2007

Canadians appear to be sharply divided about our military role in Afghanistan. Some believe the country is a "deadly sinkhole" from which the Harper government should immediately remove our soldiers, who have already suffered 60 deaths.

Others say the proud and independent Afghans, who have suffered under a heartless theocracy, communism and more during three decades of conflict and bloodshed, deserve continued military support as they continue to consolidate their fragile democracy. Canadians have an opportunity at least until early 2009 to assist this historically important country to establish a domestic peace and prosperity, which will probably also impact positively on neighbours in south Asia, including Pakistan and Iran.

Already in Afghanistan, many women and girls are being educated. For six years under Taliban rule, they risked being stoned to death for not wearing a burka or for speaking with a male on the street. Many Afghans of both genders are gainfully employed and the infant mortality rate is significantly lower.

Two recent experiences have further convinced me that the second camp is the better option for Canada despite our heavy human and financial costs. One is the recently published book *Punishment of Virtue* by Sarah Chayes, an American journalist covering Afghanistan for National Public Radio, who later returned to the country to work for an NGO, which rebuilds war-damaged homes.

Chayes' work is insightful, hopeful and encouraging. She respects and likes Afghans, including President Hamid Karzai, but stresses the need for better and firmer leadership by everyone involved with ongoing problems, including the Taliban, warlords and corruption. Following the recent deaths of 90 civilians, she would no doubt call for much better co-ordination in the future of NATO-led International Security Forces with the Afghan ones, including police and the American special forces who pursue the leaders of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Few who accept her analyses and numerous telling anecdotes are likely to move to

the "leave now" camp.

Friends of Afghanistan worldwide—but perhaps especially Canadians given our own painful experience with American "friendly fire"—are deeply concerned about continuing fatal mistakes, mostly by members of the special forces. If they and the ISAF cannot be merged, which seems the most sensible way to minimize errors, the rules of engagement for both must be altered so that combatants err always on the side of saving civilian lives.

The second was learning more about some of Afghanistan's democrats. Take, for example, Yunus Qanuni, who is presently speaker of the lower house of the Afghan National Assembly. Following the 1979 invasion of the country by the then-Soviet Union, he joined the mujahideen forces, which, with great determination and courage, finally drove the invaders out in 1989. He then became joint defence minister, but was badly injured subsequently when his car was blown up.

When the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996, Qanuni sought to unite Afghans opposed to their regime and eventually became leader of the Northern Alliance's main political party. He was named interior minister and later education minister in Hamid Kharzai's government, formed when the Taliban government refused to surrender Osama bin Laden following the events of Sept. 11, 2001 and a U.S.-led military coalition drove them out of the capital.

The United Nations sponsored the conference in Bonn, which created an interim government for Afghanistan. It was replaced in 2003 by a presidential system with a bicameral parliament. Very importantly, everything that is happening in Afghanistan is under a UN mandate. There have been troop contributions to date at various times from fully 37 countries, which protect the government and continue to fight the Taliban effectively most of the time. Ultimately, only the Afghans themselves will be able to defeat the Taliban permanently or bring them into a viable coalition.

Dr. V.P. Vaidik, an Indian academic who specializes in Afghanistan, thinks it would be rash to withdraw the Canadian or other international forces from Afghanistan at this point. He thinks the country needs its own strong army. He also advocates a Second Bonn Conference for a grand internal reconciliation, co-operation from the neighboring countries and restructuring of foreign development assistance

In the first presidential election held in 2004, Karzai won 55 per cent of the votes cast and Qanuni came second among numerous candidates with about 16 per cent. The National Assembly elections were held less than two years ago, with Qanuni winning both a seat and then being elected speaker by the members of the lower house. He is expected to run again for president.

The issues in Afghanistan are complex. Historically, however, Canadians have sacrificed much to rescue Europeans, Asians and other peoples from totalitarian regimes, including our loss of 516 soldiers during the Korean War. We are now playing important roles in consolidating peace, development, democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan. In my opinion, we should continue to do so.

*David Kilgour is a former member of Parliament and Canadian secretary of state for the Asia-Pacific.*  
[http://www.david-kilgour.com/2007/July\\_21\\_2007\\_06.htm](http://www.david-kilgour.com/2007/July_21_2007_06.htm)

# THE CASE FOR NATO TO LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

## 1. The cost

### a. Lives

Canadians do not like to hear reports of young soldiers dying abroad. Many citizens have a hard time being involved in a war and loosing many soldiers in a place that seems far away and removed from domestic issues. Further, it may be that Canada is shouldering more than its fair share of the responsibility in Afghanistan. As casualties rise, and resources at home get tighter, many Canadians are questioning continued military involvement in Afghanistan.

Canadian Forces suffering most in Afghanistan: report  
Posted: January 05, 2010, 8:06 PM by Jodi Lai

A report from *The Guardian's* Datablog says that 2009 has been the worst year of conflict for the U.K. army in Afghanistan, but that Canadian troops are actually suffering the hardest blow. On the surface, *The Guardian's* data shows that the United States has suffered the most casualties (the U.S. has lost 658 troops since 2006 while Canada has lost 125), but proportionally, the Canadian Forces have suffered the most.

The men and women Canada has lost since 2006 is 5.1% of its total current deployment, while the U.S. has lost 2.5% and the U.K. 3.6%.

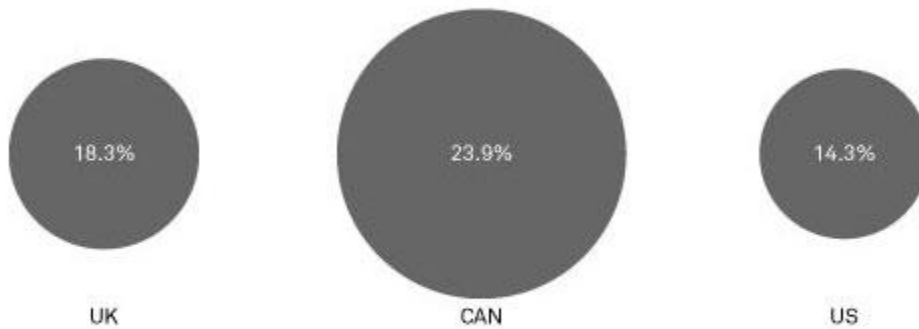
If the amount of wounded soldiers are counted, the number is even greater. *The Guardian* says a whopping 23.9% of Canadian troops stationed in Afghanistan since 2006 have been killed or injured, while 18.3% of the U.K. forces have died or been injured along with 14.3% of the United States' army, as shown in the graphic below.

Canadian troops are stationed mostly in Kandahar, as were the four troops that were killed last week in an IED blast along with Canwest reporter Michelle Lang.

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## Troop Fatalities and Wounded in Afghanistan (2006-) as % of troops deployed

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DavidMcCandless // informationisbeautiful.net // Nov 09

source: Guardian Datablog, Defenselink.mil, CBC  
% visually but proportionally exaggerated

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Info is beautiful 07 Photograph: Public Domain

The year 2009 has also seen a record number of journalists killed, some stationed in war-torn countries. Read about it [here](#).

*Jodi Lai, National Post*

*Graphic: A chart from The Guardian's Datablog shows the number of wounded troops from Canada, the United States and United Kingdom proportionally. Credit: The Guardian*

Read more: <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/posted/archive/2010/01/05/canadian-forces-suffering-most-in-afghanistan-report.aspx#ixzz0co2prLNg>

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<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/posted/archive/2010/01/05/canadian-forces-suffering-most-in-afghanistan-report.aspx>

### **b. Money**

One of the strongest arguments for Canadian troops to leave Afghanistan is that it costs so much. The Article below gives a brief overview of the amount of money spent keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan, and an idea of why it costs so much:

It costs taxpayers about \$525,000 a year to keep one Canadian soldier in Afghanistan, according to the simplest calculation possible, which is to divide the approximately \$1.5-billion cost of the mission for the 2009-10 fiscal year by the 2,850 troops who are part of it.

These figures don't take into account soldiers' salaries and benefits or the long-term health-care costs associated with service in Afghanistan. They are in line with official Pentagon estimates of what it costs to keep U.S. troops in the country.

"We don't break down costs by individuals. We look at what is the requirement to meet operational demands," said Maj. Brad Wells, of Edmonton, who until late last year was responsible for paying all Canada's bills in Afghanistan.

"What is our budget here? About \$250 million is the starting point for operations and maintenance. But that does not include strategic airlift, CANCAP (Canadian civilian contractors), our helicopters or the helicopters that we charter."

Nor does it include the \$2 billion in equipment and infrastructure that Canada has in Afghanistan.

Whatever the precise costs of keeping so many Canadians in Afghanistan, fighting a war in a landlocked country halfway around the world that has limited, dangerous and politically complicated access by road is a hugely expensive undertaking. Everything from pens to toilet paper, earplugs and rations must be brought in and then, in many cases, moved out again into the field.

"I would not want to hazard a guess on how much extra it costs for something that we use here compared to what we would pay for the same thing in Canada, but a lot of the costs are for transport," Wells said.

Maj. Tim Duncan, who was responsible for land and sea movements for the task force until November, went even further, adding, "Often the price to deliver a product is greater than the actual cost of the product."

Canada shelled out \$241,000 US a week for fuel for its aircraft and surface vehicles in Afghanistan in 2009, according to statistics provided by military public affairs officers in Afghanistan.

The task force's fleet of helicopters and transport aircraft at Kandahar Airfield consumed approximately 130,000 litres of fuel at a cost of \$155,000 a week. Just as it does in Canada and on world markets, prices for this fuel varied widely in 2009, with costs ranging from 99 cents to \$1.62 a litre.

The other \$86,000 a week that Canada spent on fuel was for diesel and gas to power generators and to keep armoured trucks, personnel carriers and tanks moving across Kandahar.

On top of its whopping fuel bill, Canada shelled out \$20.5 million this year to a NATO-affiliated company to feed the approximately 1,000 Canadian troops based at Kandahar Airfield. This works out to about \$20,500 a year for food for every soldier.

Although precise figures were impossible to come by, it cost even more to feed Canada's 1,250 forward deployed combat troops and the 300 other troops who are part of the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar city. Their victuals were provided by and delivered to Kandahar Airfield by a company based in the Persian Gulf and then moved out to troops in the field by heavily guarded combat logistics patrols.

To keep the mission up and running, a military Airbus and a C-17 jumbo transport make the 20,000-kilometre round trip at least once a week between Trenton, Ont., and the region. The air bridge also includes at least two Canadian C-130 Hercules flights into Kandahar every

week as well as six or seven chartered Russian jumbo transports a month that can cost as much as \$1.5 million per flight.

The Canadian Forces also operate a land and sea bridge from Montreal to Kandahar Airfield via Karachi, Pakistan. It includes as many as 20 sea containers a month of less critical supplies and supplies that would have no military value to the enemy. Among the many items carried in these sea and land convoys are refrigerated containers with coffee, juice and cooking dough for the wildly popular Tim Hortons outlet at the airfield. Whatever the logistical hurdles, which are many, "We try to make sure the soldier does not know that we exist," said Tim Duncan, the movements officer. "We try to make it look like smoke and mirrors."

During September and October, Brad Wells and his staff of seven military accountants paid out slightly less than \$5 million a week in-country.

"I'm kind of the banker here," Wells said in something of an understatement.

As well as handling the military accounts and the salaries of dozens of Afghan translators and a fleet of vehicles used on base, which are rented from Afghan suppliers to help develop the local economy, Wells's office holds in trust and helps process about \$9 million a year of expenses incurred by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency in Afghanistan. It also doles out money to Afghans who work on economic development projects.

Afghanistan is infamous for corruption, so particular care is taken when spending involves Afghans.

"There is a big demand for cash here," Wells said, "but there is a greater chance of bad things happening with cash, so as we try to build Afghan capacity, we want them to use a banking system.

"However, this is not always possible. For example, local Afghans are engaged to work on road repair and we pay them cash because, obviously, these people do not have bank accounts."

Although there have sometimes been unexpected and unusual expenditures, record keeping for the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent by soldiers in Afghanistan is done exactly as it would be in Canada.

<http://www.canada.com/news/Canada+Afghanistan+About+soldier/2422678/story.html>

## **2. Need has Passed**

Since the main reason we entered Afghanistan was to remove the threat of the Taliban, and the Taliban is now out of power, some say that there is no further benefit for remaining. The goal of establishing a liberal democracy where none has ever existed could be an exercise in futility, and a waste of resources. Now that the threat is gone, we should get out. That is the view of the following article:

Canada, U.S. should leave Afghanistan: expert  
CTV.ca News Staff  
Date: Sunday Jan. 11, 2009 3:34 PM ET

A retired American colonel and prominent academic is calling for U.S. president-elect Barack Obama to reconsider his plans to expand his country's military mission in Afghanistan. Andrew Bacevich, a foreign affairs specialist at Boston University, said the U.S. and allies like Canada should start to withdraw from the war-torn country because it "simply does not make sense" to stay.

Appearing on CTV's *Question Period* Sunday, he said the original objective of the mission was to make sure the region does not become a breeding ground for Al Qaeda terrorists, who could then have a safe haven to launch attacks on the West.

Bacevich said that now the Taliban has been forced out of power, there is really no need for Western countries to stay in the country and try to make it into a modern democracy. "Our interests there are very limited. As long as Afghanistan is not a sanctuary for terrorists that have the aim and capability to attack us in the West, we don't really care that much about what happens in that country," he said.

"We don't have to create a modern, coherent, Afghan nation-state in order to achieve those limited interests. The great defect, I think, of Western policy over the last few years is to assume that we have to create a modern Afghan nation state where none has ever existed." Obama has said he wants to refocus America's military attention on Afghanistan as the U.S. plans to reduce its military presence in Iraq. He has suggested that as many as 30,000 more U.S. troops could head to Afghanistan within the year.

Bacevich said that doesn't make sense during the current economic crisis, especially when the U.S. is projecting a deficit topping \$1 trillion. He said the U.S. and other Western nations can fight terrorism without being in Afghanistan.

"We're in the midst of the worst economic downturn in this country (the U.S.) since the Great Depression, and that economic downturn is affecting Canada (and it) will continue to affect Canada," he said. "The truth is that we don't have the money to sustain misguided foreign policy initiatives."

Bacevich added that it is "incumbent on us to spend our national security dollars wisely." He said the bulk of the burden in Afghanistan is being carried by the U.S., Canada and Britain, because NATO is not the cohesive organization it was during the Cold War.

"I would go back and emphasize that Canadian power and, I think, Canadian political will is limited. But it's time for those of us on this side of the border to recognize that American power and American will is also limited," he said.

[http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20090111/afghan\\_colonel\\_090111/20090111?hub=Canada](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20090111/afghan_colonel_090111/20090111?hub=Canada)

### **3. Give Afghanistan Back to Afghans**

The following article published last year, reinforces the fact that the Canadian political will is to remove our combat troops from Afghanistan by 2011. This motion was passed by a joint Conservative/Liberal Bill. The only difference between the parties was how active to be until 2011. The end goal of our mission in Afghanistan is to leave them equipped to build their own nation; safer, more peaceful, and better governed. We have done our part to provide training and support. Now, the sooner we can pull out and leave Afghanistan to the Afghans, the sooner they will be able to rebuild their own nation:

#### PM: Canada To Leave Afghanistan South In 2011

Canada will withdraw its 2,500 troops from volatile southern Afghanistan in 2011, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said Feb. 21, yielding to opposition demands for a firm exit strategy. Previously, the opposition Liberals had agreed with the ruling Conservatives for the need to maintain troops in Afghanistan to 2011 only if NATO allies send reinforcements soon. But they differed on whether Canadian soldiers should continue hunting insurgents beyond their current mandate of February 2009, or stick to a non-combat role in Kandahar province. The stalemate could have led to snap elections in March if opposition parties united to topple the minority Conservatives over their motion to extend the mission.

Now, "We both agree that Canada should continue the mission until 2011 and [that] we should leave operational decisions to our commanders on the ground in Afghanistan," Harper said in a speech to the Conference of Defense Associations. Thus, "Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, completing redeployment from the south by December of that year," he said.

A new so-called "bipartisan motion" is expected to be presented to Parliament for ratification shortly, before a NATO summit in April, he said. "It is not a position that is Conservative, nor Liberal. It is a position that is Canadian."

Liberal leader Stephane Dion was not immediately available for comment. His caucus was meeting in the afternoon to review the government's compromise offer, a spokeswoman told AFP.

Canada deployed 2,500 troops in Afghanistan's volatile southern Kandahar province as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force battling Taliban and al-Qaida fighters. Since 2002, 78 Canadian soldiers and a senior diplomat have died in roadside bombings and in melees with insurgents.

The government motion states Canada's objectives to 2011 will be tweaked, focusing hereafter on training Afghan forces and providing security for reconstruction, as requested by the Liberals. It is not clear, however, whether Canadian offensive operations would cease, as demanded by the Liberals.

The government motion states: "The ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans, in a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure and to create the necessary space and conditions to allow the Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict.

"In order to achieve that aim, it is essential to assist the people of Afghanistan to have properly trained, equipped and paid members of the four pillars of their security apparatus: the army, the police, the judicial system and the corrections system," it said. As such, "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" would be set.

However, if NATO does not send reinforcements, medium-lift helicopters and drones soon, as requested, Canada would pull out at the end of its current mandate of February 2009, the text affirms.

In recent weeks, the prime minister and Defense Minister Peter MacKay have pressed NATO allies to send 1,000 additional troops to bolster the Canadian forces in Kandahar. So far, only France and Poland have hinted they may send help.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3385605>