

AFGHANISTAN: A FRONTLINE REPORT

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story takes us to the front line in Canada's war in southern Afghanistan as we follow the soldiers of Delta Company in their difficult and dangerous fight against Taliban insurgents prior to the scheduled 2011 withdrawal date.

Definition

NATO stands for North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It is a military alliance involving Canada and 27 other countries. Its goal is to promote the stability of the North Atlantic area.

Canadian troops have been fighting a challenging and protracted war as part of the NATO mission in Afghanistan for the past eight years. As the 2011 date for the withdrawal of our troops approaches, military and political leaders, soldiers on the ground, and Canadians at home are taking stock of the conflict, evaluating the progress made against the difficulties yet to be overcome, and asking themselves if the effort has been worth the cost.

Approximately 2 800 Canadian troops were stationed in Afghanistan in the autumn of 2010. The vast majority of those troops were employed in frontline duties around the city of Kandahar, in the southern part of the country. This area, long a stronghold of Taliban insurgents, is the most dangerous theatre of the war, and Canada has paid a high price in casualties for its involvement there.

As of October 2010, 152 Canadian soldiers had been killed and thousands more had been wounded. Most of these deaths and injuries were the result of IEDs, or improvised explosive devices. IEDs are bombs hidden in fields or along roads that explode on contact with foot soldiers or military vehicles. Planting IEDs is a favourite tactic of Taliban insurgents in their relentless struggle against NATO forces.

For the soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan, the war is a daily grind, full of frustrations and dangers but also sometimes providing moments of

achievement and satisfaction. One of the most difficult aspects of the conflict for the troops is distinguishing between friend and foe. This is a war where the enemy does not engage NATO troops in full-scale battles but instead stages ambushes and hit-and-run surprise attacks. To conduct this kind of guerrilla war effectively, the Taliban has to rely on the co-operation of the local civilian population, whether it gains it willingly or extracts it by threats and intimidation. For this reason, Canadian soldiers frequently face great problems in determining whether villagers working the fields are really just innocent farmers or are in fact Taliban fighters in disguise.

In order to combat the Taliban insurgency, which has grown stronger over 2010, Canadian forces have adopted the strategy known as counter-insurgency, or COIN for short. This involves “carrot” and “stick” tactics in their dealings with the local Afghan population. On the one hand, strong measures will be taken against any village that is believed to be actively supporting the Taliban. But on the other, Canadian troops continue to make great efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people by helping to resolve local problems and bring much-needed schools, health-care facilities, and other social services to an impoverished country that has been beset by violence for the past three decades.

To Consider

1. How much do you know about Canada's ongoing war in Afghanistan? Why did the Canadian military go there in the first place?
2. Do you agree with the government's decision to withdraw Canadian troops from Afghanistan in 2011? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that the results that Canadian troops fighting in Afghanistan have achieved so far have been worth the cost in lives and money? Why or why not?

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Video Review

Definition

An *insurgent* is a person who engages in armed resistance against a government or the execution of its laws. Insurgents are commonly referred to as *rebels*.

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner, or in a small group, discuss and respond to the following questions.

1. From what you have seen in the media, how would you describe the conditions Canadian soldiers are facing in their war in Afghanistan?

2. Has the war or reports of Canadian casualties in the war affected you personally in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Do you think the Canadian public is generally supportive of the war in Afghanistan? Explain your answer.

4. What do you think are the main goals the Canadian military is trying to achieve in the war in Afghanistan? How successful has it been so far in achieving them?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to these questions in the spaces provided.

1. For how long have Canadian forces been fighting the war in Afghanistan?

2. When are Canadian troops scheduled to be withdrawn from Afghanistan?

3. How many Canadian troops are currently stationed in Afghanistan?

4. In what part of the country are most of these soldiers based?

5. How many Canadian troops have been killed in Afghanistan as of October 2010?

6. What was the cause of most of these deaths?

7. What is the name of the insurgent force that is fighting against Canada and other NATO countries in Afghanistan?

8. Why is the line between friend and enemy insurgent frequently murky for Canadian troops on the ground in Afghanistan?

9. What measures do Canadian forces take in order to win the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population in the area?

10. What nickname do Canadian troops give for foot patrols through farmers' fields? Why is it appropriate?

11. What information do Canadian troops try to extract from the local Afghan village elder during their meeting with him? Why is this important to them?

12. What evidence do Canadian troops point to in order to prove that they are making progress against the Taliban in the area?

13. What evidence is there that some Canadian soldiers are experiencing great frustrations and anger in their dealings with the local population?

Post-viewing Questions

1. Now that you have watched the video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. How has watching the video helped you respond to the questions in greater depth? Have your opinions changed in any way? Explain.

2. Are you persuaded by the claims of Canadian soldiers interviewed in the video that they are making progress in their fight against the Taliban? Why or why not?

3. How successful do you think COIN has been so far as a strategy to combat the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan?

4. What do you think the situation on the ground in southern Afghanistan will look like when Canadian troops are finally withdrawn in 2011?

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W *Why are we fighting in Afghanistan?*

Focus for Reading

In your notebook create an organizer like the one below. As you read the following information on the background to Canada's military mission to Afghanistan, write down key points in your organizer. You should be able to enter at least two or three points in each section of your chart. You will be using this information in the activities that follow the text material.

Why are we fighting in Afghanistan?
The Origins of the War <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Canada is part of a NATO force that invaded Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.• NATO forces succeeded in driving the Taliban from power but failed to capture Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.• Bin Laden has continued to threaten further terrorist attacks, but to date nothing as serious as September 11 has occurred.
Canada's Role in Afghanistan
The Decision to Extend the Mission
The Situation as of November 2010

The Origins of the War

The NATO mission in Afghanistan is the direct result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. Shortly after those world-shaking events, then-U.S. president George W. Bush declared a "war on international terrorism" and identified the Taliban regime that had ruled Afghanistan since 1996 as the first target of U.S. retribution. Bush accused the Taliban leaders of offering a base of operations for Al Qaeda, the extremist Islamic group that claimed responsibility for the September 11 attacks and of providing sanctuary for its elusive leader, Osama bin Laden. When the Taliban refused to hand bin Laden over, the United States and other NATO countries, including Canada, launched an all-out military assault on Afghanistan. Its goals were to drive the Taliban from power, destroy Al Qaeda, and capture bin Laden.

Less than a month after the invasion began, NATO forces and their Afghan allies, an anti-Taliban coalition of groups known as the Northern Alliance, entered Kabul, the Afghan capital, in triumph. Ousted but not totally crushed, the Taliban retreated into the rugged, mountainous regions of the country to regroup and resume their resistance against the invaders, a fight that continues to this day. The Taliban's main stronghold lay in the southern part of Afghanistan, especially the area around the provincial capital of Kandahar, which was the headquarters of the Taliban's mysterious and enigmatic leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar.

In late 2001, NATO forces believed that they had cornered bin Laden and other top Al Qaeda leaders in the remote mountains of Tora Bora that form part of the rugged and inaccessible border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But despite relentless, round-the-clock bombing by U.S. and NATO warplanes using state-of-the-art explosives, neither bin Laden nor Omar was apprehended, and both leaders remain at large today. It is widely believed that they have found hideouts in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, a remote area that is rife with Taliban supporters and is almost beyond the control of the Pakistani government and army.

In the years following the September 11 attacks, bin Laden has released frequent video statements to the world. In these he has taunted his American foes for their failure to capture him, denounced U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere, and called on Muslims worldwide to initiate a "global *jihad*," or holy war, against the West.

Canada's Role in Afghanistan

Canada dispatched a naval task force to the Persian Gulf in October 2001 to assist the NATO invasion of Afghanistan. Canadian troops have been fighting in Afghanistan since February 2002, when the first battle group from the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry arrived in the southern province of Kandahar. Eight years later this war-torn region remains the main focus for Canada's ongoing military commitment to the struggle against Taliban insurgents.

While Canada's initial military involvement was concentrated in the southern part of Afghanistan, the focus of its operations shifted from 2003 to 2005 to the area near the capital, Kabul. Canadian troops were part of the International Security Assistance Force, whose role was to help the fledgling Afghan government establish some form of national security in the run-up to the country's first free national elections. This vote resulted in victory for anti-Taliban leader Hamid Karzai, who defeated his main opponent from the

Northern Alliance and remains in power to this day.

But by early 2006, a renewed Taliban insurgency in Kandahar had led to a rapid deterioration of the military situation in that region. To deal with this threat, Lieutenant-General David Richards, who was then the British commander of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, called for the deployment of 8 000 troops, including 2 200 Canadians, to fight alongside Afghan National Army (ANA) units and secure the region against the Taliban. By September 2006, over 2 500 Canadian soldiers were taking part in an effort code-named Operation Medusa, after the creature from Greek mythology whose horrifying face was believed to turn her enemies into stone.

At the beginning of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, the government of the day—then led by Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien—had imposed a deadline of February 2009 for the withdrawal of Canadian troops. But as NATO's struggle against the Taliban proved more difficult than expected, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper—which came to power after the January 2006 federal election—announced its intention to extend the deadline.

The Decision to Extend the Mission

In October 2007, Prime Minister Harper asked former Liberal cabinet minister John Manley to conduct an investigation into Canada's military mission to Afghanistan. Manley's report, tabled in January 2008, recommended that the mission's life be extended beyond the original 2009 deadline. But Manley also stated that Canada should only agree to stay on longer in Afghanistan if other NATO nations committed more troops, especially in the war-ravaged southern

part of the country where Canadian forces were beginning to sustain significant losses.

In his report, Manley also recommended that the Canadian government should equip its troops with state-of-the-art equipment and weapons that would enable them to prosecute the war more effectively. As well, Manley felt that Canada's role should shift from a strictly combat mission to an effort that would focus more on diplomacy, the training of an Afghan national police force, and the provision of much-needed humanitarian and development aid to the country. This last measure would involve the building of schools, health-care clinics, and other facilities such as sources of clean water and agricultural development.

The Situation as of November 2010

In March 2008, Parliament voted to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan to December 2011. The minority Conservative government won the support of the opposition Liberals, but both the Bloc Québécois and the NDP opposed the decision. Despite the fact that the war against the Taliban appears far from won, and the situation on the ground, especially in the Kandahar region, has actually deteriorated markedly over 2009 and 2010, Canada remains firmly committed to the 2011 withdrawal deadline.

U.S. President Barack Obama, who took office in January 2009 and made the successful prosecution of the war in Afghanistan a major foreign-policy objective of his administration, has quietly urged Canada to reconsider its position. So have many top NATO leaders who have valued Canada's commitment and sacrifices so far.

But the Afghan war remains a matter of great controversy at home in Canada. People are very proud of the performance of our troops, and especially of their efforts to promote much-needed reforms such as making it possible for more young girls to attend school. But there are growing doubts about the wisdom and ultimate goals of the mission.

Opinion polls have consistently shown that a small majority of Canadians favour the withdrawal of our troops by 2011, while some believe that the pull-out should occur even earlier. Opposition to the war appears to be strongest in Quebec, the province that ironically supplies most of the recruits for the fighting in Afghanistan. Accusations by former diplomat Richard Colvin in the spring of 2010 that Canadian troops had been indirectly involved in the mistreatment of captured Taliban suspects, including some innocent Afghans, put political and military leaders on the defensive and undermined popular support for the mission.

By late October 2010, the death toll of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan stood at 152, with many more wounded. Processions of military funerals along Ontario's Highway 401, renamed the "Highway of Heroes," were becoming a solemn and frequent occasion. Many towns across the country were mourning the loss of a valued young local individual in uniform. Apart from the human cost, it was estimated that the mission to Afghanistan would eventually add up to \$18-billion by the time the deadline for withdrawal finally arrived in December 2011, a figure that amounted to approximately \$1 500 for each Canadian household.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other to complete any missing information.
2. Do you think that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda still pose a serious threat to the security of the world? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the Canadian government made the right decision when it decided to extend the deadline for the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think the Taliban insurgency has become a more serious problem for Canadian and NATO forces fighting in Afghanistan over the period from 2009 to 2010?
5. Do you think the human and financial cost of the mission to Afghanistan for Canada has been worth the effort? Why or why not?

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The Hard Realities of the War

Quote

“Once the effort required gets so huge that it is no longer balanced by the value of the political purpose, it must be abandoned.”
— General Karl von Clausewitz, *On War* (1873).

Reading Prompt

As you read the information in this section, ask yourself what lessons history might be able to offer to those responsible for conducting the military mission in Afghanistan. Focus particularly on: a) the Vietnam War of the 1960s and early 70s and b) the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, 1979-88.

A Different Kind of War

Eight years after the onset of hostilities, Western political leaders such as Prime Minister Stephen Harper, U.S. President Barack Obama, and their respective senior military officials continue to insist that that war is worth fighting and that considerable progress has been made. But public opinion in both Canada and the United States is becoming increasingly skeptical about such claims, and support for the war, which was never very strong to begin with, has been markedly declining in both countries.

One major problem in conducting a military operation like the Afghan war is determining just what would constitute “victory” against a nebulous and shadowy opponent such as the Taliban. Afghanistan is not a conventional war like the Second World War, where the armed forces of enemy nation-states squared off against each other in epic theatres of combat on the land and sea and in the air—with the goal of totally destroying their opponents. Instead, it is more like the Vietnam War of the 1960s and early 70s. In that conflict the United States found itself mired in an unwinnable struggle against a well-organized and highly motivated local insurgency that fought a relentless guerrilla campaign, resulting in the defeat of the world’s foremost superpower.

Historical Parallels

To those old enough to remember the Vietnam War, the Afghan conflict bears

many eerie similarities, and appears at times almost as a case of history repeating itself. As in Vietnam, foreign forces are engaged in the military occupation of a country that has a long and proud history of determined resistance to outside invaders. In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, military strategists believed that the best way to defeat the local insurgency was to adopt a policy of counter-insurgency—nicknamed COIN in Afghanistan. One of the main goals of this approach is to win the hearts and minds of the population so it could be persuaded to abandon its support for the insurgents and transfer its allegiance to the occupying forces and the government they were seeking to install.

But in both wars the governments backed by the foreign powers enjoyed little loyalty from the people they claimed to have the right to govern. As was the case with many of the South Vietnamese regimes the U.S. sought to support during the 1960s, the government of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan is widely discredited both at home and abroad because of rampant corruption and flagrant attempts to rig elections in its favour. In many parts of the country its political and military authority is very tenuous, and frequently the local population looks to the Taliban, not the pro-NATO government in Kabul, as the real authority on the ground. This was also the case in Vietnam, where the pro-U.S. government was able to hold the major population centres while

Quote

"... the towns are held by the government and the villages by the Taliban. By day, the state is visible, by night, the Taliban."
— Mohammad Mohaghegh, Afghan politician (*The Globe and Mail*, June 9, 2010)

commanding almost zero support in the countryside where the insurgents held sway.

A Difficult Country to Govern

Afghanistan has one national government, but its people are divided among a variety of ethnic groups, none of which constitutes a majority of the population. The Pashtuns, who comprise just over 40 per cent of the Afghan people, are largely concentrated in the southern part of the country and form the basis of support for the Taliban. On the other hand, the Tajik and Uzbek minorities, found mainly in the northern provinces bordering the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, gave their support to the warlords of the Northern Alliance in its battle against the Taliban that led them into Kabul in 2001.

According to Thomas Barfield, author of *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, one of the biggest failures of U.S. and NATO policy in Afghanistan has been its inability to establish a form of government that would take these serious inter-ethnic differences into account and establish a more decentralized form of government for the country. Instead, much like the Soviet Union, one of Afghanistan's previous occupying powers, the U.S. encouraged the setting up of a highly centralized government in Kabul, with Hamid Karzai and his cronies using their authority to siphon off into their own pockets many of the billions of dollars in foreign humanitarian aid earmarked for the "hearts and minds" campaign.

Afghanistan after the War

One of the proudest boasts of the Karzai regime and its NATO backers is the fact that women are now freer than they were

under the repressive Taliban regime, and that girls can finally attend school, something that was previously forbidden. In fact, the well-known humanitarian Greg Mortenson, whose books *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones into Schools* have become world-wide best-sellers, has argued that efforts to promote the education of girls in Afghanistan may constitute the greatest weapon NATO enjoys in its struggle against the Taliban. But Afghanistan remains a very conservative, male-dominated, and traditional society, where most women in rural areas still wear the burqa and may not even be aware of the freedoms their constitution grants them.

It is very difficult to determine popular opinion in a country like Afghanistan, but some outside observers think there is evidence that most Afghans have mixed feelings about the Taliban regime. On the one hand, they resented its narrow-minded Islamic approach to government, its brutality, its suppression of the Shi'ite Hazara minority group, its support for Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda terrorists, and its outright refusal to grant rights to women and girls. But on the other, most Afghans give grudging credit to the Taliban as the only regime to date that succeeded in stamping out corruption and providing a degree of security and safety in a country that has experienced widespread violence and instability for decades. While they would most likely not welcome their return to unchallenged power, many Afghans believe that the Taliban are a force to be reckoned with, are not going to disappear, and may eventually have to be included in any post-war power-sharing arrangement once the NATO military mission in their country finally comes to an end.

Follow-up

1. With a partner or in a small group compare your responses from the Reading Prompt activity. What lessons can recent historical events like the Vietnam War or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan offer to those responsible for conducting the military mission in Afghanistan today? How do you think they could apply these lessons to the current conflict?
2. Read the quote from von Clausewitz in the margin on page 42 and explain what you think it means in your own words. To what extent do you think its message could be applied to the military mission in Afghanistan?
3. In your opinion, what would signify “victory” for Canada and the other NATO powers fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan? Do you think this is a realistic goal? Why or why not?
4. What do you think a possible post-war political settlement in Afghanistan might look like, following the eventual withdrawal of Canadian and other NATO troops?

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A Day in the Life

Reading Prompt

As you read this section, ask yourself how you would experience being a member of the unit of Delta Company on patrol in a small Afghan village. What challenges would you have to handle as part of such a mission?

In April 2010 a Canadian reporter accompanies a group of soldiers from Delta Company of the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry on a mission to Khairo Kala, a small village just west of the Afghan city of Kandahar. The temperature is a blistering 35 degrees Celsius the day this unit enters the village, really just a ramshackle collection of dusty mud-walled, single-room homes dotting narrow winding pathways that serve as streets. Around the village, fields of grapes, poppies, and wheat stretch into the distance until they meet the looming summits of the mountains far away.

The soldiers of Delta Company have paid a high price for their mission in this dangerous part of Afghanistan, already losing four members by the time *Toronto Star* reporter Louie Palu joins them on patrol. Upon arrival in the village, an elderly Afghan man steps forward to greet them. He is the village malik, or headman, an influential authority who serves as a conduit between Canadian troops and the local population. Such people frequently supply much-needed information about the operations of the Taliban in their area and the degree of support they may enjoy or extort among its residents. But in this case, the Canadians are taking no chances and frisk the elder before questioning him about the possible location of IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, in the roads and fields around Khairo Kala.

The orders of the day call for the unit to search the surroundings for IEDs and remove them before they can cause

injuries or death. Among the soldiers are engineers and bomb specialists who are experts in defusing IEDs, known as Explosive Ordnance Disposal, or EOD. As the troops fan out into the nearby fields, they are looking for evidence that the soil has been disturbed in any way. This could indicate the presence of an IED, or it could equally just mean that a local farmer had been digging a hole in the ground.

The stress rises to almost unimaginable levels as the men of Delta Company engage in what Canadians in Afghanistan refer to as "IED hopscotch." This macabre expression signifies the extreme risk they run while searching for these potentially deadly explosives. The reporter carefully steps into the footprints of the soldier immediately ahead of him so as to minimize the danger of inadvertently stepping on an IED while breaking new ground. While doing so, the horrifying thought flashes through his mind that he might die from loss of blood if his foot were to be blown off by an IED. The search pays off when one IED is located and destroyed and the components of another one are identified. During their patrol, the soldiers talk about the Oscar-winning film *The Hurt Locker*, which depicts U.S. troops conducting a similar search in Iraq. They find it entertaining, but far from realistic when it portrays U.S. soldiers looking for IEDs on their own and not as part of a unit.

After a long and demanding day, the exhausted members of Delta Company return to their mud-baked bivouac to

bunk down for what is likely to be a hot and uncomfortable night. While Canadian soldiers can now catch some much-needed rest, they are uneasy in the knowledge that the dark hours of the night are the time when Taliban insurgents are busy nearby, planting the next deadly crop of IEDs in the surrounding fields and along the roads that NATO military vehicles will have to travel the next day. But along with the Taliban, the sleeping soldiers must also cope with more immediate annoyances such as scorpions, ants, spiders, and bloodsucking insects that leave painful bloody welts all over their bodies. Occasionally an early morning rain shower arrives to cool off the encampment, but most of the time the heat barely dissipates during the hours of darkness. Because of the stress they must handle on a daily basis, and also as a means of keeping the insects at bay, almost every single member of Delta Company is a heavy smoker.

On patrol the next day, the unit discovers a huge IED powerful enough to kill everyone on the mission, 60 deadly kilograms of explosives and shrapnel that could cut half a dozen men to pieces

in the blink of an eye. They meet with a group of villagers who assure them that there are no Taliban insurgents operating in the area, information that is taken with more than a grain of salt since several of these informants are suspected of being Taliban supporters themselves. The Canadians have learned that the local Taliban have decreed that any villager known to have talked to the soldiers will pay with his or her life. This makes the task of extracting necessary information about the location of IEDs even more difficult.

The soldiers look nervously at any farmer in the field, who might in fact be a Taliban “trigger man” waiting for the signal to detonate an IED. Women and even children are also viewed with suspicion as potential Taliban operatives. After five days of “IED hopscotch,” the unit has four IEDs and components to show for its efforts and returns to base with the depressing conclusion that, at least for now, the small Afghan village of Khairo Kalo is firmly under Taliban control.

Source: Palu, Louie. “Inside Canada’s ‘Hurt Locker.’” *Toronto Star*, May 2, 2010

Analysis

1. With a partner or in a small group, share your responses to the Reading Prompt above.
2. a) Given the conditions the soldiers of Delta Company must cope with on patrol in Afghanistan, what would you expect their attitudes about the local population to be?

b) How might this interfere with one of the major goals of counter-insurgency: the winning of the hearts and minds of the people?
3. The Greek myth of Sisyphus depicts the ordeal of a hero who is condemned to roll a huge rock up a steep hill during the day, only to have it fall back down each night. The next day, he must complete his onerous task once again. How might this myth apply to the work of the soldiers of Delta Company in their search for IEDs in Afghanistan? What conclusions may be drawn from this analogy?

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Activity: Exit Strategy for Afghanistan

Watch

To learn more about Canada's policy in Afghanistan watch a speech by Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon at www.international.gc.ca/ministers-ministres/Cannon_Video_Afghanistan.aspx?lang=eng.

The government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced that a full withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan will occur by July 2011. This decision was taken despite the objections of U.S. and NATO military leaders who believe the Canadian contribution to the military mission is still required—and also over the protests of the members of some military families who have lost loved ones in the conflict and believe Canada should carry on fighting.

Here are the details of the government's plan for withdrawal:

- The bulk of Canadian troops will be fully withdrawn by July 2011.
- The withdrawal will include both regular Canadian Forces troops and elite "Special Force" units.
- Some Canadian military officials may remain behind in advisory roles to the Afghan National Army (ANA).
- Canada will continue to offer humanitarian aid to Afghanistan for economic development.
- Some Canadian security forces will remain in Afghanistan to protect Canadian diplomats, NGO officials, and other civilians working in the country.

Your Task

Working in small groups, devise what you think would be a workable exit strategy for Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Decide when you think such a withdrawal should take place, and whether or not it should be all troops currently stationed in Afghanistan, or only some of them. Also indicate what presence, if any, you think Canada should continue to maintain in Afghanistan after the troops have been withdrawn.

Then discuss the likely consequences of such a withdrawal for the government and people of Afghanistan, and especially the area around Kandahar where Canadian troops have been active. Speculate on whether the Afghan government will be able to deal with the threat of the Taliban without outside assistance. What kind of government will have to be established in order to transform Afghanistan into a peaceful, secure, democratic, and more economically developed country? Is such a goal even possible in the immediate future?

Once you have completed your task, your teacher may ask you to present your plan to the class. Following this, the entire class may debrief the information presented in the reports and evaluate the arguments in favour of and against a Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2011.