

CANADA'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN: SUBMISSIONS
TO THE MANLEY PANEL

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The involvement of Canadian forces in Afghanistan marks the first time since the Korean War that the Canadian military has been engaged in a combat mission. When the first Canadian troops deployed to Afghanistan in October 2001, they were part of the US-led international force fighting the "War on Terror" in response to the 9/11 attacks. The earliest Canadian contribution to the mission involved naval units sent to patrol the north Arabian Sea. Later, in January 2002, 750 Canadian soldiers were sent to Kandahar province for six months to assist US troops in a combat role.

In December 2001, following the November 2001 overthrow of the Taliban regime, the UN passed resolutions that endorsed the establishment of a transitional authority in Afghanistan and authorized the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a multi-national military force charged with securing Kabul and surrounding areas in cooperation with the Afghan Transitional Authority.¹ NATO took over command of the ISAF in August 2002, making this the first NATO operation outside of Europe.²

From August 2002 onward, Canadian military units served under the ISAF in Kabul and surrounding areas. In May 2005 the Canadian government began sending troops from Kabul back to the more volatile province of Kandahar with a mandate to secure the area to enable civilian reconstruction and development efforts.³ Between February 2002 and May 2008 the Canadian forces in Afghanistan incurred a total of 83 fatalities, most of them since 2006 during the current mission in Kandahar.⁴

In May 2006, one year after the original decision to redeploy troops to Kandahar, the Canadian parliament approved an extension of the military mission to February 2009. As with earlier decisions about Canadian forces in Afghanistan, there was little official public debate about this extension. From the inception of the mission to Afghanistan, Canadian federal opposition parties have questioned the lack of official debate on the issue in parliament.

The ongoing controversy prompted Prime Minister Stephen Harper in October 2007 to establish an independent advisory panel to examine options for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan at the end of the current mandate, February 2009. The