

## Task Force Kandahar ready for winter

by BGen Denis Thompson

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Over the last few weeks, there has been a change in the air here in Kandahar Province. Clouds are appearing in the sky, the temperatures are approaching what Canadians might actually consider habitable, and we even had a brief rain shower a few mornings ago. All this means one thing: winter is coming – and so is a shift in our approach to operations here in Kandahar.

On our deployment to date, we've faced some interesting challenges and had successes that we don't hear enough about.

This summer, we were able to significantly disrupt the insurgents' command and control network. Many of their mid- and senior-level commanders were neutralized, including several key improvised explosive device (IED) experts. We also seized multiple IED facilities, weapons caches and supply nodes. Eliminating their leadership and disrupting their supply lines has a lasting effect on insurgents' ability to operate in the province.

Afghan National Security Forces continue to make progress. One of our mentored kandaks [battalions] is assessed to have the highest level of operational readiness of any in the country. This unit is now conducting successful operations in Helmand Province, where the insurgents' ploy to seize Lashkar Gah was soundly repulsed. This is reminiscent of the Afghan National Army's quick victory over insurgents in the Arghanda, and another indicator of their growing operational capability.

The Afghan National Police is starting from further behind, but are making substantial progress as well. Of note is the fact that Kandahar City enjoyed relative calm during Independence Day celebrations, Ramadan, Eid, and several recent gatherings in and near the city. The big problem, of course, has been the recent spate of assassinations and attacks but, apparently, [Afghan] National Directorate of Security has recently arrested three individuals believed responsible for several of these murders.

Task Force Kandahar is focussing on two things.

First, we're going to deepen the level of security in key areas in Kandahar Province, where the majority of the population resides – Kandahar City, the districts of Dand, Daman and Arghandab, and portions of Zharey and Panjwayi. Our aim is to increase local perception of security in these areas, and set the conditions for economic growth and reconstruction and development work.

Second, we're going to take the fight to the insurgents in areas they consider to be "safe havens". We have a distinct advantage in that we can continue to conduct operations throughout the cold winter months, while the insurgents are typically limited in the scope of their activities. In the past, many fled to Pakistan during the winter season, but increased anti-insurgent operations along the border region are making this less attractive. Our intent, therefore, is to deny the insurgents the ability to rest, re-supply, and reconstitute their leadership in Kandahar Province this winter. Doing this will force them further from population centres, limit their ability to conduct large-scale operations, and make it increasingly difficult for them to terrorize the population.

Members of Task Force Kandahar put forth an excellent effort on a daily basis. They are making a difference here, in spite of difficult conditions, and Canadians have every reason to be very proud.

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