

## THE AFGHAN MISSION

**Canadians open new front against Taliban**

**Push into insurgents' territory part of a flurry of NATO activity in southern Afghanistan as winter starts to impede enemy's movement**

**GRAEME SMITH**  
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KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN -- A Canadian-led offensive opened a new front against the Taliban in Kandahar this weekend, adding pressure on the insurgents as they also faced a major attack from NATO and Afghan forces in neighbouring Helmand.

Canadian soldiers and their allies advanced on foot into the fields around Zangabad, a village about 40 kilometres southwest of Kandahar city, at daybreak on Saturday. An Afghan military statement later said 10 insurgents were killed in the attack, but a Canadian commander said the number was higher, without giving details.

Under the name Operation Sure Thing, the offensive marked the first time Canada's battle group has fought alongside the famed Gurkhas, soldiers of Nepalese origins who have fought under British command since the 1800s. Afghan soldiers also joined the fight.

The Canadians made their push into Taliban territory at the same time as British and U.S. forces continue to lead an effort to recapture Musa Qala, a town in northern Helmand province that the insurgents had used as a model for their alternative system of government.

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NATO officials had initially predicted a swift victory in Musa Qala, but after the death of two NATO soldiers over the weekend, the battle appeared to lose momentum. Brigadier-General Gul Aga Naebi, commander of the Afghan Army's 205th Corps, said 12 insurgents were killed on Saturday in Musa Qala, but none yesterday.

"We have surrounded Musa Qala town, but we haven't entered it yet," Brig.-Gen. Naebi said.

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"Compared to what happened in Musa Qala? Musa Qala is nothing," Major Moffet said.

Embedded photojournalist Louie Palu, travelling with the Canadian troops, saw smoke rising from artillery and air strikes that continued through Saturday, and Canadian soldiers kicking down doors of mud-walled homes.

He also witnessed a Canadian medic and soldier helping a Taliban fighter who was gunned down by Afghan forces, then carrying their wounded enemy 1,400 metres over rough terrain for medical evacuation.

The immediate goal of the Canadian offensive was to halt the persistent Taliban attacks on a newly established police station in Panjwai district, Major Moffet said, declaring the action a success.

The flurry of NATO activity in southern Afghanistan also comes as winter starts to impede the movement of insurgents. They're no longer comfortable sleeping outside and snows block the mountain routes to Pakistan.

In Kandahar, the Taliban territory now being targeted by Canadian forces is familiar ground, having already been captured in Operation Baaz Tsuka during the same cold season last year and later lost to the insurgents in the spring-time.

In Helmand, too, the fighting focuses on a town that British troops abandoned last year under pressure from the Taliban.

An air strike in the Nowzad district of Helmand province this weekend killed 12 civilians and left a boy as the sole surviving member of the family, said Abdul Satar Mazahari, head of the refugee department in Helmand province.

The British military reportedly described those killed in the strike as insurgents.