

IN DEPTH

**Afghanistan****Joint operations****The pros and cons of teaming up with the U.S. in Afghanistan**

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There were sighs of relief in government circles earlier this month when the United States agreed to provide at least an additional 1,000 marines to the Canada-led mission in Kandahar.

Finding an extra 1,000 combat soldiers to help the 2,500-strong Canadian military mission in troubled southern Afghanistan was a key Canadian condition — along with more air power — for keeping our troops there until the end of 2011.

But will the deployment make any difference on the ground — or, perhaps more importantly, to the overall conduct of the war and how it is perceived by the Canadian public?

With the new, more side-by-side relationship between American and Canadian soldiers in southern Afghanistan come new questions: How will the two countries' troops be organized, and who will command them? What is to be done with Taliban prisoners, a contentious issue on which Canada and the U.S. follow different rules? What about drug-eradication policies and the use of air strikes when civilians might be at risk, two other issues on which U.S. and Canadian policies differ?

These and other questions are vexing Canadian military experts who have long contended that more troops were needed in Kandahar but were not sure where — NATO, France, the U.S.? — they would come from.

The most ebullient welcome for the Americans comes from such supporters of Canada's presence in Afghanistan as retired Maj.-Gen. Lewis Mackenzie, who served with the United Nations force in Bosnia in the 1990s.

He sees the U.S. move as an important morale booster for hard-working Canadian soldiers who tend to like and respect their American counterparts and have often trained together with them.

"I'm absolutely delighted," Mackenzie told CBC. "God bless the Americans."

His main caveat is that, even with this new deployment, there are still too few international troops in Afghanistan to get the job done.

The international intervention in Kosovo in the late 1990s saw up to 40,000 troops sent to a region with a population of just over 2 million, a ratio of one soldier per every 50 inhabitants. By contrast, Afghanistan has a population of nearly 32 million but only about 47,000 international troops, or one per every 681 Afghans. (See chart at the bottom of the story.)

Numbers aside, there are also "substantial differences" in the military approaches that Canada and the U.S. have been practising in Afghanistan, notes one of Canada's foremost military experts, Wesley Wark of the University of Toronto.

"I think our Canadian officers must be keeping a stiff upper lip [about this new arrangement]," he says.

While the U.S. brings a compatible, well-equipped and ultra-professional army to the table, Wark said, it also has the image of being a big power pursuing its own agenda, with an over-reliance on measures such as air strikes. That approach could quickly overturn any goodwill that Canada, with its more

hearts-and-minds approach, may have developed in the Afghan communities in which it works, he adds.

### **Eradicating poppies**

One of the biggest differences between the Canadian and U.S. approaches to Afghanistan has been the war on drugs, particularly the eradication of opium-producing poppies.

Canada's unofficial policy, as any soldier will tell you, has been to look the other way when passing fields of poppies or marijuana. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said on a couple of occasions that Canada is not involved in eradication programs directly but supports the idea of finding alternative crops for opium producers.

The U.S., on the other hand, has lent its soldiers and equipment to an on-ground eradication program that is grudgingly supported by the Afghan government.

For a couple of years now, it has also been pushing hard for aerial spraying of poppy fields (as U.S. officials have been doing in Colombia with the assistance of the Colombia military). But this is an approach the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai and the British military contingent in Afghanistan, among others, have strongly opposed.

Opponents argue that aerial spraying, while perhaps making a short-term dent in Afghanistan's record opium production, will only remind villagers of the Soviet Union's chemical spraying during the Soviet-Afghan conflict in the 1980s and drive impoverished farmers even more closely into the arms of the Taliban.

The U.S. campaign, however, is so relentless that the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, William S. Wood, the former ambassador to Colombia, has earned the nickname Chemical Bill in the British press for his willingness to have himself sprayed with glyphosate, the main ingredient in the Monsanto-created herbicide Roundup.

With the Afghan opium crop estimated at near-record levels again this year, Afghan watchers like Roohullah Rahimi of the Centre for Afghan Progress in Ottawa say they have concerns that American anti-narcotics policy could overshadow other aspects of the mission.

America's already dominant role in other parts of the country, says Rahimi, raises broad questions whether countries like Germany or Canada can retain the influence they desire in the regions where they have been, until now, operating alone.

### **Taliban prisoners**

The issue of what to do with prisoners is another topic on which Canada and the U.S. have, at least on the surface, diametrically opposed positions. When Canadian troops were first sent to Afghanistan in 2002, then prime minister Jean Chrétien made it a point to say that Canada would not be handing any prisoners over to the U.S., which was operating under its own rules.

Canada's policy has been to question detainees at its Kandahar airfield base and then hand them over to NATO or, more recently, to the Afghan government in the form of the National Directorate of Security (NDS).

The handovers were formalized in a written agreement signed by Gen. Rick Hillier in 2005. This agreement proved problematic because initially it didn't allow for Canada to follow up on detainees, even as the minister of defence and the prime minister said in Parliament that this was being done. What's more, the NDS, Afghanistan's feared intelligence police, has been accused by agencies such as the International Red Cross of beating and torturing its captives.



Canada has also asked NATO for helicopters and unmanned surveillance aircraft, both of which are likely to come from the U.S. (Rodrigo Abd/Associated Press)

In the case of the U.S., the problem is somewhat similar. It has accumulated over 600 prisoners at its so-called temporary facility at Bagram military base — more than twice the number of detainees the U.S. is holding at the more publicized Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba.

Many of these prisoners have been at Bagram for five years or more without charges or legal representation. Some have even been brought there from other countries, and the Red Cross, for one, says some of the treatment they've received violates the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war.

The U.S. has helped the Afghan government build a new \$30 million US high-security detention centre near Kabul. But the administration of this site has also been problematic and, with transfers to Guantanamo stopped, Bagram continues to grow.

More importantly, from a Canadian point of view, the U.S. has not wanted to give up its right to interrogate detainees as it sees fit, which could be tricky if someone is captured during a joint Canada-U.S. operation in Kandahar, or even during a U.S. patrol that falls under Canada's broad leadership in that province.

Wark says there might be some practical agreements on this issue that could be hammered out but that it is hard to see the U.S. giving up control over interrogation — unless, perhaps, NATO was to take a stronger stance on detainees, which to date it has not been inclined to do.

#### **Compatible command**

While neither the U.S. Pentagon nor Canada's Department of National Defence is releasing details of how the two countries' forces will work together in Kandahar, it's generally assumed that an American general will be added to the rotating command structure of what's known as Regional Command South. That command is in charge of Canadian, British, Dutch and other forces deployed in six provinces in southern Afghanistan.

Integrating command and operations in Kandahar should not be a problem, according to Adam Chapnick of the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. The militaries of Canada and the U.S., he says, have traditionally worked well together.

"We use the same equipment; we have similar approaches; our medical personnel have the same training as theirs," Chapnick said. "The U.S. likes to work with us, and we like to work with them."

The U.S. also brings air power, particularly the air transit capability that Canada has asked for so that patrols and resources can be moved around the country without encountering the roadside bombs that have proved so deadly.

It will also likely bring massive amounts of new and important military intelligence to the joint Kandahar operation.

These additions, however, are not without their problems.

"The biggest drawback," says Wark, "[is the Americans'] over-reliance so far on air strikes whenever it suits their military commanders on the ground." The resulting civilian casualties have not won Washington broad support among ordinary Afghans.

It is a similar situation with intelligence gathering, much of it done through the more shadowy special forces who are not integrated into international command structures. The U.S. is essentially fighting in two guises in Afghanistan, Wark said: as an independent military power doing whatever it can to take out al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership; and as part of an international command structure sponsored by the United Nations and NATO.

"Ideally, I think Canadian commanders would have liked well-equipped forces from a friendly, unobtrusive NATO partner like the Dutch, if they had had more troops to offer, or the British," says Wark.

Instead, for the next two and half years, beginning in July, Canada will go into battle in southern Afghanistan with its American neighbour, for better or worse.

Source: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, NATO; [Centre for Strategic and International Studies](#)

<b>Country of conflict</b>	<b>Peak number of international troops</b>	<b>International soldiers per capita</b>
Afghanistan	47,000	1 per 681
Haiti	20,000	1 per 375
Iraq	155,000	1 per 161
Kosovo	40,000	1 per 50