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CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEWSWEEKLY

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Embassy, September 17th, 2008  
EDITORIAL

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## Picking and Choosing from the Afghan Motion



this week's cover  
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On Sunday morning, Defence Minister Peter MacKay appeared on CBC to defend Prime Minister Stephen Harper's promise to end the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan by 2011.

In early 2006, weeks after becoming prime minister, Mr. Harper had travelled to Afghanistan where he told Canadian soldiers that anyone who didn't support the combat mission wanted Canada to "cut and run" from its commitments to Afghans.

### Columnists

Leslie Campbell  
Gwynne Dyer  
Scott Taylor  
Richard Gwyn  
Luke Eric Peterson  
Vladimir Torres  
Lunch with Brian  
Chatter House

Of course, that was in the very early days when Canadian casualties were low, general Rick Hillier was spouting off his tough talk about bad guys to great effect, and the prime minister thought embracing the Afghanistan mission and its strong military overtones was the only right thing to do.

More than two years later, public opinion over the mission is at its lowest point and Mr. Harper, long opposed to setting an end date to the Afghan mission, has switched gears in his search for a majority government.

### Opinions

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That is why Mr. MacKay was on television, defending the prime minister's pledge and refuting allegations Canada was indeed "cutting and running" from the war-torn country.

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The defence minister reiterated that Canadians "have done our share" and he countered arguments that setting an end date would embolden insurgents. "It doesn't take much to embolden the Taliban," Mr. MacKay said. "They've been a very persistent and very aggressive insurgency, which is the challenge itself."

Fair enough. But then came the shocker.

Mr. MacKay said the end of the military mission did not constitute the end of Canada's work in Afghanistan—wait for it—but that the mission would change. Specifically, Canada will "emphasize the humanitarian aspect, continue with training, continue with our people there that are both with the domestic police and maybe on the military side to build...capacity.

"We have combat engineers that are there helping with the Dahla Dam," the defence minister continued. "We have people building roads and supervising some of the training exercises that go on, but the emphasis will change, and that's consistent with the parliamentary resolution."

So let us get this straight: Canadian soldiers will remain in Kandahar until 2011, at which point the majority of them will leave, but Canada will shift the emphasis to humanitarian efforts, training of Afghan security forces and development?

Isn't that supposed to happen starting in 2009?

That, after all, is what the parliamentary resolution actually states.

## EMBASSY MULTIMEDIA

Interview with James Laxer

Titans of the 20th Century:  
Trudeau, Castro, and the Cold  
War

## Federal Politics Matters



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