

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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## New base beefs up Afghanistan presence

By **Drew Brown**, Stars and Stripes

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MAIWAND DISTRICT, Afghanistan — U.S. forces are beefing up their presence in southern Afghanistan, building a new base and joining a Canadian task force in an effort to stem a rising tide of violence in the heartland of the Taliban insurgency.

The construction of Forward Operating Base Ramrod, about 50 miles west of Kandahar, the former stronghold of the fundamentalist movement, puts the newly-deployed 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment in an area that has seen a sharp rise in attacks.

"This was a district that has been identified as needing a larger coalition presence," said Maj. Cale Brown, executive officer for 2-2 Infantry, during a recent visit to the new base.

In an unusual arrangement for U.S. forces, 2-2 Infantry has been placed under the command of the Canadian-led Task Force Kandahar. Canada has 2,500 soldiers in the southern province, where it has held overall security responsibility for the past three years.

But the addition of the 800 or so U.S. soldiers nearly doubles the number of combat troops in Task Force Kandahar, said Navy Lt. Alain Blondin, a spokesman for Canadian forces.



*Drew Brown / S&S*

**Sgt. Kenneth Kelly, of Detroit, maneuvers a sheet of plywood into place as he works on the flooring for a tent at Forward Operating Base Ramrod in Maiwand district, in Afghanistan's Kandahar province. Kelly and other soldiers from Bravo Company, 62nd Engineers are building the base, which is the new center of operations for 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment. The battalion moved into the district last month to reinforce Canadian troops in Kandahar province, the heartland of the Taliban insurgency.**



*Drew Brown / S&S*

**Soldiers from Darkhorse Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment prepare to move out from Forward Operating Base Ramrod, in Maiwand district, in Afghanistan's Kandahar province.**

"It brings about 70 to 80 percent more in terms of boots on the ground," he said.

The American troops assumed responsibility for their area of operations on Aug. 27. In a statement at the time, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force said their mission would be to improve security in the district so that reconstruction and political development can take place.

ISAF officials have identified Maiwand as an important logistics hub for the movement of Taliban fighters, weapons and money.

"It's been part of a trend that we're here to help mitigate," Brown said.

Stars and Stripes first reported in early August that 2-2 Infantry was moving into Maiwand district.

The Fort Hood, Texas-based battalion was supposed to deploy to eastern Afghanistan, but was shifted south after the Taliban pulled off a dramatic jailbreak in Kandahar in June, freeing hundreds of imprisoned fighters, according to a U.S. officer.

Insurgent attacks have skyrocketed in Afghanistan in the past three years, especially in the south and east, where the Taliban and al-Qaida are strongest.

Insurgent attacks in Kandahar province have increased since the jailbreak, and have not slowed in September, despite the fact that it is the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, according to Canadian military officers.

During the first 18 days of Ramadan, which began earlier this month, soldiers of Task Force Kandahar have encountered 80 roadside bombs, most of which were detected and neutralized before they exploded, they said.

"It's been a steady climb (in attacks)," said one officer Thursday, who spoke on background, in accordance with standard briefing rules. "It's been busy, and the insurgents aren't slowing down."

More than 120 U.S. troops and more than 100 soldiers from other

**Soldiers from 2-2 Infantry moved into the district and started building the base last month, as part of an effort to reinforce Canadian troops in Kandahar, the heartland of the Taliban insurgency, and to disrupt the flow of fighters and weapons from neighboring Helmand province.**



*Drew Brown / S&S*

**Staff Sgt. Michael Crouse, of Ingraham, Ill., of Darkhorse Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, pulls security as other soldiers talk to shop owners during a patrol in Maiwand district, in Afghanistan's Kandahar province.**

NATO-led countries have been killed in Afghanistan this year, putting 2008 on track to be the deadliest year for foreign forces in the country since the war began seven years ago. More U.S. troops have already been killed this year than at any other point during the war.

Nearly 600 U.S. troops and almost 400 soldiers from other countries have died in Afghanistan since the start of the war, according to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), a Web site that tracks U.S. and allied deaths here and in Iraq.

The strengthening of U.S. forces in southern Afghanistan comes as Canada has signaled that it intends to scale down its commitment, a move which could further worsen the security situation in this part of the country.

Last January, Canada threatened to pull its troops out of Afghanistan unless other NATO countries boosted their commitment, a move that prompted Defense Secretary Robert Gates to order a Marine battalion to neighboring Helmand province. The Marines have already started pulling out, and have been replaced by British and Afghan troops.

On Sept. 10, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper pledged that his country's forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2011, saying that the Canadian public would not support keeping its soldiers in the country more than 10 years. A Parliament measure passed in March requires only that Canadian forces be withdrawn from Kandahar province by that date.

Canada was one of the first countries, along with the United States, Great Britain and Australia, to send troops to Afghanistan, after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Canada has lost 97 soldiers and one diplomat, the third highest toll in the war, after the United States and the United Kingdom.

There are about 60,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, 33,000 of which are American. About 19,000 are serving under ISAF. Most of the rest are serving under an independent U.S. command in the east.

President Bush has ordered an Army brigade of about 3,700 troops originally scheduled for Iraq to deploy instead to Afghanistan in January.

However, U.S. Gen. David McKiernan, the senior general in Afghanistan, has said that about 10,000 more U.S. ground troops are needed in addition those reinforcements.

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# 800 troops arrive to southern Afghanistan



Written by Staff Sgt. Adora Medina 3rd BCT, 1st Infantry Division Public Affairs  
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BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan (Sept. 17, 2008) – A recent deployment of U.S. forces into southern Afghanistan has added 800 troops into the region, and villagers are the first to see the transformation.

Combined with the efforts of Canadian forces, the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, the Maywand District is now at

its highest level of military support.

Afghan children watched intently as 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, Soldiers crossed the narrow alleyways leading into the heart of the local market, recently.

While the troops mingled with the community, the children's initial hesitation was apparent as they seemed to conceal themselves in the shadows. Their apprehension was expected, considering this was the first time many had ever seen the digitized Army Combat Uniform since U.S. forces arrived to the region, roughly two months ago.

"We went to the bazaar to show that there's a presence of U.S. Army in the area now. The more they see us, the more comfortable they feel," said Sgt. Raymond Diaz, a native of Queens, N.Y. "They've had so many people come in and out of this area and there was no stable presence."

Prior to the arrival of, 2-2 Inf. Reg. the Canadian military had been the district's only dedicated, long-term presence. Cpl. Matthew Hrycuik, a Canadian soldier with the North Saskatchewan Regiment, saw British and Portuguese forces come and go since his arrival to the Maywand District only six months ago.

Hrycuik said the extra air and weapons assets the U.S. military brings with it are needed and appreciated.

"It's going to take a lot of work though; so many small towns around here are so spread out," Hrycuik said. "Cruising around, we found tons of places where

they've never seen [Coalition forces] period. They know nothing about the government and they know nothing about the district leader here in Maywand. They just go about their own thing."

Another challenge facing Coalition forces is communicating their goals and objectives to the Afghans. With this recent influx of troops into the district, the villagers are not sure how to react.

"The people are definitely affected by [the Taliban] and they're affected by us," Master Cpl. Tatyana Danylyshyn, psychological operations, Canadian Scottish Regiment, said. "It's the actions taken by the other party that decide who affects them more."

The troops hope that by increasing their visibility, they'll increase their influence.

"We've been here a couple of times and repeat visits, like familiarity with the person, help us to develop relationships, and that's where we start to make progress," Danylyshyn said.

At the end of the day the same timid children whom originally hid from the Soldiers no longer kept their distance, trailing the light infantrymen up and down the busy streets, and all the way back to the entrance of their camp.



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