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Brig.-Gen. Jon Vance, the new commander of Task Force Kandahar, takes questions after a change of command ceremony. THE CANADIAN PRESS/ Murray Brewster



## U.S. troop buildup no threat to Canada's Kandahar accomplishments: general

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Canadian troops have a new commander in Afghanistan.

Brig.-Gen. Jon Vance officially took charge of the 2,850 soldiers, aircrew and support staff in Kandahar today and he said he welcomed the influx of fresh American troops.

With so much Canadian blood, sweat and treasure poured into Kandahar over the last three years, Vance said Canadians back home shouldn't view the U.S. buildup as the Americans taking over.

"I see no threat at all to Canada's pride of accomplishments and pride of place in the future as long as we're here," Vance said following a ceremony where he formally took over from Brig.-Gen. Denis Thompson, who ended a nine-month tour Thursday.

U.S. President Barack Obama announced this week that 17,000 extra American soldiers and marines would be sent to Afghanistan this year to bolster the fight against the Taliban.

Although details have yet to be finalized, Thompson said it's expected a new U.S. combat brigade will be deployed in Kandahar province, where Canadians have fought hit-and-run battles with Taliban militants since February 2006.

Since Canada first deployed troops to Afghanistan, 108 soldiers have been killed and just under 400 seriously wounded. The mission has also cost the life of one diplomat and two aid workers.

By the time the army's battle group comes home in 2011, the country's involvement in Afghanistan is expected to cost taxpayers in excess of \$18.3 billion, according to a report tabled last fall by the Parliamentary budget officer.

Vance said he believes the incoming U.S. troops will not overshadow the Canadian contingent and will likely operate in their own area of the province - in places where it's been impossible to station NATO troops.

They will "definitely be an addition," he said.

Canada has since 2006 pleaded for reinforcements in Kandahar, which along with the neighbouring Helmand province, has been the epicentre of Taliban resistance.

Vance said he expects the new American soldiers will report independently to NATO's southern command and not fall under Canadian command.

As part of the bargain that saw Canada get some relief and Parliament extend the country's mission to 2011, the U.S. agreed to place one infantry battalion under Canadian control last year.

That unit will remain as part of the Canadian task force, said Vance.