

Afghanistan: European involvement

IN DEBATES ABOUT CANADA'S CURRENT AND future involvement in Afghanistan, options proposed by the government and opposition parties range from the extension of the mission in Kandahar beyond its current mandate to the complete and immediate withdrawal of Canadian Forces. Canada's policies and commitments are of course part of a broader international effort to achieve security and the reconstruction, development, and democratization of Afghanistan. The continued engagement of the international community is crucial if these goals are to be met. Hence, Canada's decision on its future involvement affects and is affected by its allies' engagement in Afghanistan. This paper offers a brief overview of the involvement of the European Union (EU) and key European countries and their approaches to the international mission.¹

Context

Afghanistan in European foreign policies. European countries are making significant contributions to diplomatic, military, reconstruction and development assistance efforts in Afghanistan. However, national foreign policies in several European countries and the approach taken by the EU differ from those of Canada and the United States for at least two reasons. First, while Europeans see Afghanistan as a key security and foreign policy challenge *outside* Europe, priorities closer to home are more pressing. Chief among these is Kosovo, where the likelihood of a unilateral declaration of independence in early 2008 threatens to destabilize the western Balkans. The European Union and its member states are heavily invested in this region, where they provide substantial financial and technical assistance, policing and military forces, and they are planning to retain a significant military and police presence there for years to come. EU members account for almost 80% of the 16,000 soldiers deployed as part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR). Germany, France and Italy each contribute more than 2,000 soldiers, the UK

about 200, the Netherlands 1 and Canada none.² The EU also plans to significantly step up its presence by sending "up to 1,800 police, judges and administrators to Kosovo."³ In addition, the EU runs the international military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR-Althea) – currently 2,455 troops, among whom 347 are German, 333 Italian, 130 French, 74 Dutch, and 18 British – as well as a police mission in that country (167 police officers and civilians from EU countries).

The second reason for a divergence between North American and European approaches is a profound scepticism in Europe among the general public and many politicians about international efforts to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. In part, this appears to stem from the fact that many Europeans view Afghanistan primarily in the context of the US-led war on terrorism, which is widely regarded as failing because of a perceived focus on military efforts. In addition, there is concern that the current strategy lacks sensitivity to the cultural, ethnic and historical specificities of Afghanistan. As a result, many Europeans believe there is an urgent need to reassess the international community's efforts and strategies.⁴

Despite these differences, European decision-makers have shown a commitment to provide significant levels of assistance to Afghanistan. In particular, there is strong support for initiatives to promote the protection of human rights – specifically women's rights – at least as far as the European Parliament and public opinion are concerned. However, there is widespread opposition in many European countries to the involvement of their troops in combat operations, particularly in southern Afghanistan.

National caveats and deployment in combat missions. The most difficult and politically controversial issue in this context concerns the willingness of the 39 countries that are contributing troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) not

only to send a sufficient number of personnel but also to deploy them in combat missions and in the more dangerous regions of Afghanistan. Four countries – Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands – currently make up the bulk of the ISAF forces in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the most volatile areas. Most of the other countries contributing to ISAF have so far been unwilling to make significant contributions to security – including through counter-insurgency operations – in southern and eastern Afghanistan, such as by offering to replace Canadian troops in Kandahar when their current mission ends in February 2009.

In addition to limits on where troops are deployed, some countries have imposed restrictions – often referred to as “national caveats” – on what their troops can do in Afghanistan: “These restrictions, for example, may prohibit forces from engaging in combat operations or from patrolling at night due to a lack of night-vision equipment.”⁵ In some cases, national caveats would prevent military units from being released to assist allied forces “in moments of danger.”⁶ It should be noted that it is quite common for governments or military superiors to place written or unwritten caveats on their forces deployed abroad. Often, this is linked to the type of units deployed, their training and their equipment, but it can also reflect domestic political pressure. National caveats can substantially limit the operational capability of multinational forces and their ability to accomplish their missions.

Given the increased scope and frequency of Taliban attacks over the past two years and the expansion of the ISAF mission into southern Afghanistan in 2006, deployment in volatile regions and participation in combat operations have increasingly dominated discussions among NATO partners about the effectiveness of the ISAF mission and its course for the future. As one report notes: “When in 2006 NATO’s ISAF began to replace US troops deployed in southern Afghanistan under the OEF [Operation ENDURING FREEDOM] mandate, this effectively also meant that ISAF would become increasingly involved in combat operations. However, ISAF’s geographical expansion also led to increasingly visible cracks within the coalition, especially when the Taliban launched an insurgency campaign in southern Afghanistan in 2006.”⁷

European contributions and approaches

European Union.⁸ The EU itself – as distinct from its member states – does not currently have the mandate or capabilities to contribute to military operations in Afghanistan. NATO and the EU have developed a close, cooperative relationship aimed at avoiding duplication or competition between the Alliance and the evolving European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). This means that in areas where NATO is not (or is no longer) directly engaged through a military mission, the EU can take the lead, running the mission in close coordination and cooperation with NATO. For example, drawing on NATO’s assets and planning, the EU took over responsibility from NATO in 2004 for the international military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The military involvement in Afghanistan by EU member states is significant: 25 of the 27 EU members contribute to the 39-nation, NATO-led ISAF mission, accounting for 21,682 or 52% of the 41,741 soldiers deployed in December 2007. The EU and its members have also made a considerable contribution in other areas. Collectively, they “accounted for about 30% of the \$12.5 billion in grants pledged by the international community for Afghan reconstruction at international conferences in Tokyo (2002) and Berlin (2004). At the London Conference in spring 2006, the [EU] and member states pledged a further USD 2.4 billion ... for reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan over the coming years.”⁹ The European Commission (EC) on its own spent an average of about C\$290 million per year between 2002 and 2006. In 2004-2005, the EC was the second largest donor of official development assistance (ODA) to Afghanistan, making the country the EC’s fourth largest aid recipient (after Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro, and Morocco).

In 2007, the EC adopted a new Country Strategy Paper for 2007-2013, which states that “the guiding principle for EC assistance will be to utilize Government structures wherever this is feasible in implementing programmes and to provide continued support to existing national programmes.” The strategy provides that EC assistance will focus on areas where the EC has expertise and experience or where other donors are not engaged. The “focal areas” specified in the strategy are rural development, governance and health. “Non-focal areas” are social protection, landmine clearance and regional coopera-

tion, while “cross-cutting” issues are human rights and civil society (including gender and media issues), and environmental concerns.¹⁰ In June 2007, the EU set up a new EU police mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL), which builds on Germany’s police training programs. Canada agreed to participate in the EUPOL mission in June 2007.

United Kingdom.¹¹ The British government strongly supports the ISAF mission and a more assertive approach to stabilization efforts. It has backed its commitment with significant troop deployments and development assistance funding. In many ways, the approach taken by the government of the UK is similar to that of the Canadian government: both believe that democratization, good governance and development cannot be achieved without security, and that security requires robust military capabilities and combat operations. In keeping with this view, both have simultaneously invested heavily in military, development, governance, and diplomatic efforts. As in Canada, there are no constitutional or legal requirements in the UK for a parliamentary mandate to send troops abroad.

The UK is second to the United States with respect to troop contributions to ISAF. Currently, over 7,700 British personnel are deployed to Afghanistan as part of the ISAF mission, up from 4,600 in May 2006. The BBC reported in October 2007 that the UK government is considering sending additional reinforcements. Most British ISAF troops belong to combat units and are deployed in the southern Helmand province, the main poppy-growing region of Afghanistan. The UK has the lead in ISAF counter-narcotics efforts and has run the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Helmand since May 2006. It previously led PRTs in Mazar-e-Sharif (2002-2006) and Meymana (2002-2005), both in northern Afghanistan. The UK also provides service personnel to the headquarters of ISAF and of OEF, both located in Kabul. Eighty-six British Forces personnel and Ministry civilians have died while serving in Afghanistan since October 2001.

The UK has played a central role in international efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan. According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: “Since 2001 the UK has committed over [CAD\$ 2.2 billion]¹² to Afghanistan. [C\$1.03 billion] has been pledged in

development assistance over 2002-2007, with the UK being the largest bilateral donor to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. In addition, the UK has spent over [C\$695 million] in military support to Afghanistan, over [C\$138 million] on security sector reform, and over [C\$41 million] to support elections.”¹³ After the US, the UK is Afghanistan’s second largest bilateral donor. Bilateral aid to Afghanistan accounted for 2.3% of British ODA in 2004-2005, making it the sixth largest recipient of bilateral aid.¹⁴

Netherlands.¹⁵ In taking an “integrated approach” to its engagement in Afghanistan, the Dutch government has also pursued policies that are in many ways similar to those of the Canadian government. The Netherlands has argued: “Security and stability are essential conditions for development. That is why the Netherlands believes that in conflict-prone regions, development programmes are not enough. They need to be combined with action on the political, military and economic fronts. This integrated approach (Defence, Development and Diplomacy) is crucial to achieving lasting peace, security and development.”¹⁶ Dutch support for a more robust engagement is reflected in the government’s decision in early 2006 to send up to 1,700 troops to the southern Uruzgan province as part of ISAF, initially for a two-year period. The Dutch government must inform Parliament before it deploys armed forces abroad, although it does not require a formal parliamentary mandate.

When the Dutch government considered deploying combat troops as part of the ISAF mission in southern Afghanistan in 2005-2006, many politicians expressed serious concern that engagement in combat operations would compromise the ability of Dutch forces to win support among Afghans for their reconstruction efforts. A second issue of concern has been the handling of prisoners taken by OEF and ISAF forces, the Dutch government being one of the most outspoken of the European allies in its criticism of how prisoners captured in Afghanistan have been handled by US forces. Before the deployment of troops in 2006, this issue was addressed in a memorandum of understanding, concluded in late 2005, between the Dutch and Afghan defence ministries.

In late November 2007, despite significant public opposition, the government decided to extend the

Dutch mission for about two years. This decision followed offers from several European NATO countries to provide assistance. Before the decision was announced, “the Dutch defence minister said his country’s [existing contingent of] 1,500 soldiers would remain in Afghanistan until its own forces could mount an ‘independent defence’.”¹⁷

As of 5 December 2007, the Netherlands had 1,512 troops in Afghanistan. Most of these personnel are part of ISAF’s PRT in Uruzgan, for which the Netherlands assumed responsibility in August 2006. Canada, the UK and the Netherlands rotate as lead nation of ISAF’s Regional Command South in Kandahar, where they take turns providing the Commander and the bulk of the staff. The Dutch military currently has, in addition to ground forces, an Apache helicopter detachment and a Chinook and F-16 detachment in southern Afghanistan. The latter is based in Kandahar and supports both the ISAF and the OEF missions. The Netherlands also has about 250 troops serving in Kabul and northern Afghanistan. According to media reports, 12 Dutch military personnel have died while serving in Afghanistan since October 2001.

On the diplomatic front, the Dutch government has advocated a strategic, regional approach that calls for the Alliance to engage the key countries in the region: Pakistan, India and Iran. The Netherlands has contributed significant resources to reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. Dutch development aid spending in Afghanistan was worth C\$74 million in 2005 and C\$107 million in 2006, with planned spending of C\$113 million in 2007. Bilateral aid to Afghanistan accounted for 1.7% of Dutch ODA in 2004-2005, making it the 7th largest recipient country of bilateral aid. Since 2001, the Netherlands has provided emergency assistance and supported the Afghan government through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). It helped organize the parliamentary and presidential elections, and has supported the fight against opium production and trafficking as well as the work of aid organizations in landmine clearance.

Germany.¹⁸ As well as being an important player on the diplomatic front, Germany has been one of the largest contributors of military personnel and development assistance to international efforts in

Afghanistan. Insofar as the German government has adopted a comprehensive “civil–military approach,” arguing that both of these elements are necessary and complementary prerequisites for reconstruction and development, the country’s position on what the international community needs to do to bring security, good governance and development is broadly similar to that of its major allies. However, Germany has been widely criticized for its unwillingness to contribute to ISAF combat missions, in particular in eastern and southern Afghanistan, for what many consider to be the inadequate capabilities of its ISAF forces, and for imposing some of the most restrictive national caveats of ISAF contributing nations.

Unlike Canada, the UK and the Netherlands, Germany requires an explicit mandate from the lower house of parliament – the Bundestag – before German troops can be sent on military missions abroad. As a result, German participation in ISAF and OEF is widely seen as being particularly susceptible to domestic political pressures. In addition to concerns about the impact of combat operations on stabilization and reconstruction efforts, and about exposing German troops to greater risks, German politicians and the public are also particularly averse to accepting the possibility of civilian casualties of ISAF and OEF combat operations. After a lengthy public debate, the ISAF mandate – including that for six reconnaissance planes and ground support – was extended in October 2007 for one year. But the government rejected calls from NATO for Germany to send troops to participate in combat operations in the south. The mandate for German OEF participation, which was extended in November 2007, allows the government to deploy a total of 1,400 armed forces personnel – including 100 special forces and 1,000 marines. Currently 300 marines are deployed in the Mediterranean and at the Horn of Africa. German special forces have in the past participated in OEF combat operations in Afghanistan.

There are currently 3,140 German troops in Afghanistan, making it the third largest contributor of military personnel to ISAF (as of 1 November 2007). They are equipped and trained for stability operations but not for combat and are deployed in northern Afghanistan, where Germany runs two PRTs – in Kunduz (since October 2003) and Feyzabad (since September 2004). Germany has been the “lead

nation" of ISAF Regional Command North, which is responsible for five PRTs. Germany has six Tornado reconnaissance planes stationed in Mazar-e-Sharif. The German army has also leased 20 Leopard 2A6M tanks to Canada. Twenty-two German service personnel have been killed in Afghanistan.

With a total financial commitment to reconstruction and development of C\$1.3 billion by 2010 and bilateral debt forgiveness of C\$107 million, Germany is Afghanistan's fourth largest bilateral donor. Bilateral aid to Afghanistan accounted for 0.8% of ODA in 2004-2005, making it Germany's 14th largest recipient of bilateral aid. German development cooperation has focused on building and strengthening governance structures and human resource capacity and has concentrated on four areas: energy (in particular, renewable energy), drinking water, sustainable economic development, and primary education. Other areas of development cooperation are the rule of law, human rights, the improvement of the status of women and girls, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Germany has been Afghanistan's "key partner" in the area of police training and capacity-building, but its efforts have been criticized as ineffective. In mid-2007, the European Union took over the lead in this area, and the German project was transferred to the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan.

France.¹⁹ By contrast to Canada, the Netherlands, and others who promote multi-dimensional engagement strategies that link security, good governance, and reconstruction and development, French policy places much less emphasis on integrating these elements. It also focuses more explicitly and exclusively on security, especially in its contribution to efforts by the international community. France has taken a robust approach to ISAF and OEF, arguing that the two are closely linked and that the focus of the Alliance's involvement should be on stabilization and on fighting terrorism and the drug trade. Although France supports international efforts in the areas of reconstruction, governance and development, and while it is active on a bilateral level in these areas as well, it does not support the view that NATO should or can be effective in all these areas. France does not have a PRT and "does not believe that PRTs can play a meaningful role in Afghanistan."²⁰ The deployment

of troops to military missions abroad does not require a parliamentary mandate or debate. However, the National Assembly has some influence through its control over budgetary matters.

France now contributes nearly 1,300 personnel to ISAF. This includes 280 military personnel dedicated to training the Afghan army and special forces (a priority area for France), as well as 540 personnel deployed at ISAF's Regional Command Capital in Kabul. In 2007, France moved six fighter jets from Tadjikistan to Kandahar, which are being used in "intelligence and close air support missions,"²¹ including in support of Canadian ground forces. About 400 French troops are deployed with OEF in Afghanistan and the region. Twelve French military personnel have been killed in Afghanistan.

The Afghan mission has played an important role in France's reassessment of its NATO policy. Since 2001, France has increasingly supported the Alliance's shift to a focus on "out-of-area" responsibilities.²² Also, in September 2007, President Sarkozy announced that his country is ready to rejoin NATO's integrated military command structure, from which it withdrew in 1966,²³ while supporting a stronger EU security and defence policy. France continues to be fully committed to supporting ISAF and OEF efforts in Afghanistan. During his November 2007 visit to Washington, President Sarkozy told Congress: "France will remain engaged in Afghanistan as long as it takes, because what's at stake in that country is the future of our values and that of the Atlantic Alliance."

France's focus on security is also reflected in its level of ODA spending. As Afghanistan's 13th largest bilateral aid donor, France ranks below the other countries discussed here, as well as the United States and Canada. With respect to bilateral aid, Afghanistan was not one of the top 15 recipient countries of French ODA in 2004-2005.²⁴ This fact reflects France's regional development assistance focus on Africa, which accounts for 12 of its 15 top aid recipients. Nevertheless, France has made considerable contributions to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan in various areas, including humanitarian assistance, counter-narcotics activities, the training of judges and the establishment of the Afghan Parliament, and well as in health care and agriculture.

Italy.²⁵ Notwithstanding its very considerable contribution of troops to ISAF, Italy appears to have taken a more restricted and low-key approach to its involvement in Afghanistan relative to Canada and the UK. Although the Italian government recognizes the need for a stronger international effort in all areas – “security, governance, socio-economic development, regional cooperation, human rights protection and counter-narcotics”²⁶ – it does not appear to have an integrated or whole-of-government approach to its mission in Afghanistan. Instead, it has focused on its military mission in western Afghanistan and its involvement in rebuilding and strengthening the judicial system.

From 2001 to 2006, Italy contributed approximately C\$420 million in development assistance, and about C\$225 million in aid is planned for 2007-2009. Bilateral aid to Afghanistan accounted for 0.8% of Italian ODA in 2004-2005, making it the 8th largest recipient country of bilateral aid. Italy’s reconstruction and development efforts have focused on governance, in particular the judicial system, as well as on infrastructure projects. The Italian Government has been the lead donor country in the international community’s efforts to rebuild and strengthen the justice sector of Afghanistan. In July 2007, it hosted a Conference on the Rule of Law in Afghanistan,²⁷ which secured about US\$360 million in pledges from international donors.

There are approximately 2,358 Italian troops in Afghanistan, including army, air force and Special Forces personnel. Italy is the lead nation in Regional Command West and is responsible for the PRT in Herat province. Ten Italian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan.

Since the April 2006 elections that brought the centre-left coalition of Prime Minister Romano Prodi to power, Italian policy toward Afghanistan has been greatly affected by domestic political instability. In February 2007, Mr. Prodi resigned after losing a vote in the Senate on Italy’s foreign policy and role in NATO, including its military mission in Afghanistan. He stayed on as prime minister, winning a subsequent confidence vote and a new vote on the Afghanistan mission. However, opposition from within his governing coalition to Italy’s military involvement in Afghanistan as well as pressure for a complete withdrawal of Italian troops have contin-

ued. Mr. Prodi has reaffirmed Italy’s commitment to remaining in Afghanistan, but he has urged that a new long-term strategy be adopted for the international mission; his foreign minister has also called for an end to the separate OEF mission in Afghanistan, reflecting concerns among some European allies about the coordination between the ISAF and OEF missions. The Italian government has also continued to resist pressure from some NATO allies for Italy to lift its restrictions on the use of its forces outside their current area of deployment (for example to assist ISAF forces in combat operations in the south). Finally, Italy has been criticized by its major NATO allies for the handling of a hostage crisis in March 2007, when an Italian journalist was freed in exchange for the release of five Taliban militants.

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7 January 2008

SOURCES

1. This paper draws heavily on official government, NATO and European Union websites, as well as on Paul Gallis, “NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance,” Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, updated 23 October 2007, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf>.
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 - Please note that, as the NATO website states, “troop numbers are based on broad contribution and do not reflect the exact numbers on the ground at any one time.” Therefore, numbers on the ISAF website may differ from those on national government websites.
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 - Only direct quotes are cited with specific references in the endnotes.
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