



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Canada and the War in Afghanistan

October 2001–March 2014

Historical Overview

On September 11, 2001, the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, which was sheltered by the Taliban government in Afghanistan, attacked the United States and killed nearly 3,000 people. Canada joined a US-led coalition to root out Al-Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban. Canadian soldiers battled a growing Taliban insurgency, supported Afghanistan's new government, and mentored Afghan security forces. Canada's combat mission concluded in 2011, while Canadian troops continued training Afghan soldiers until 2014. The Taliban retook control of Afghanistan in 2021. Over 40,000 Canadians served in the long war, most of them now veterans.

About the War

Canada committed forces to Afghanistan in October 2001. Shortly after, Canada sent a naval component to monitor the Arabian Sea and the region for terrorist activity. Canadian soldiers began to deploy to Afghanistan in December 2001, with the main battle group arriving in February 2002. Canadians initially protected Kandahar Airfield and supported American operations elsewhere in the country.

In 2003, Canadians joined the International Security Assistance Force led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Kabul, Afghanistan's capital. In 2005, they returned to Kandahar province, in southern Afghanistan. Canada's initial commitment of a provincial reconstruction team was broadened to include a battle group.

In 2008, the mission was expanded to include an air wing. Canadian soldiers fought alongside NATO and Afghan partners to secure key areas from the Taliban. Over six years, they were engaged in large-scale battles and daily firefights, braved roads seeded with improvised bombs, protected development projects, and tried to win the trust of the local population.

In July 2011, Canada ended its combat commitment in Kandahar but continued training Afghan national security forces in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. In 2014, Canadian forces left Afghanistan, ending Canada's participation in the mission.

Remembering the Afghanistan War

More than 40,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces served and 158 Canadian soldiers died during the Afghanistan mission. Thousands of other veterans of the war were wounded physically and psychologically, leading to additional deaths by suicide.

Throughout the war, and in the years that followed, Canadians debated the scale and scope of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. While some questioned the war and its costs, others expressed support for the soldiers and civilians involved.

During the 13-year mission, Canada's military played an important role in combating the Taliban insurgency and attempted to restore some normality to a shattered country. In August 2021, American forces withdrew from Afghanistan, and Afghan forces crumbled. The Taliban regained control of the country. In the wake of these events, Canadian aircrews and military personnel returned to Kabul as part of a multinational operation to conduct emergency evacuations out of Kabul's international airport. When their role in the operation ended, on August 26, 2021, they had evacuated nearly 4,000 Canadian citizens and Afghans seeking to flee Taliban rule.

The end of Canada's contribution to the war in 2014, and the events that followed, brought personal and national reflection on what had been accomplished and what had been lost.