

Expect Canadian Troops to Stay in Afghanistan After 2011

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, October 09, 2010

<https://politicsrespun.org/2010/10/expect-canadian-troops-to-stay-in-afghanistan-after-2011/>

The *National Post* appears to have begun supporting Canada's military presence in Afghanistan beyond the end 2011. Don't expect us to leave. At all.

Do you remember when we were absolutely, positively going to leave by 2009? So naive. And do you remember that we went there to catch that Osama bin Laden fellow?

This week we see the jingoistic tone emerging in the *National Post* which can create cover for a decision by an imperialist Harper and a likely nod of support from his Con-Lib coalition co-leader, imperialist Ignatieff:

- On Tuesday we read on the front page, above the fold, that a mother of a dead Canadian soldier wants us to keep fighting. [see below]
- In the same article we read the word "adamant" to describe Harper's commitment for our troops to withdraw before the end of 2011. Adamant makes Harper look like he doth protest too much.

And today we have a war correspondent style [review of our engagement](#) there.

Also, a couple months ago in McLean's we read about some key cracks in our commitment to leave next year, and their resulting developments:

- The March 2008 motion is for Canadian troops to leave Kandahar, not Afghanistan.
- Ignatieff is suggesting we leave some troops behind to train Afghans, and I suppose quietly "advise" them as well.
- Peter McKay called that idea interesting, but in an attempt to appear to disagree with those Liberals, he says the government will respect the "letter of the motion" which, again, only requires us to leave our mission in Kandahar.

Ultimately, expect NATO or Karzai to request that when we leave Kandahar we step up to some new mission elsewhere in the country. And please be disabused of the notion that we're actually committed to leaving. It just means you'll be dizzy from the spin.

Consider the excerpts from those two stories below [emphasis is mine, unless noted]

The mother of a soldier who died in Afghanistan made a poignant appeal yesterday to Prime Minister Stephen Harper to keep Canadian troops here beyond next summer.

...

"I think the military is doing a fine job and he should reconsider pulling out next year."...

The mission in Kandahar is scheduled to end in 2011. The deadline was set in a March 2008 vote in the House of Commons. Nothing in the House motion would prevent Canada from assuming a different military mission elsewhere in Afghanistan, but until now the Prime Minister has been ***adamant*** that all Canadian troops will be out of the country by the end of next year.

via [EXTEND MISSION: MOURNING MOTHER](#).

And some more insightful and subtle analysis of the vibrant loopholes in this whole issue [from John Geddes at *Maclean's*](#):

The Liberals propose ending the Kandahar combat mission as scheduled, but leaving some of our troops to train Afghan forces elsewhere in the country.

MacKay allows that the Liberal idea is “all very interesting.” However, he stresses that the government remains bound by the March 13, 2008, House of Commons motion that set that 2011 exit date in the first place. “We’ll respect the letter of the motion,” MacKay says.

But the letter of the motion, it seems to me, is often lost in this discussion. Prime Minister Stephen Harper suggests the House demanded a complete end to the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan. Harper [reiterated](#) that by now familiar interpretation as recently as June 4.

That’s not what the motion says. Its key clause dictates that the government must “notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in *Kandahar* as of July 2011, and, as of that date, the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of *Kandahar* and their replacement by Afghan forces start as soon as possible, so that it will have been completed by December 2011.” (My emphasis.)

As far as I can see, there’s nothing in the motion that says Canadian troops must clear out of Afghanistan altogether, just Kandahar. If the government plans to “respect the letter of the motion,” then, that would seem to me to allow a fair bit of flexibility.