

General wants Canadian trainers in Kandahar

NATO commander says Canada's work in southern Afghanistan has been 'invaluable'

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OTTAWA -- NATO's top training commander in Afghanistan says Canadian military instructors are needed in Kandahar, not the safer confines of Kabul, where the Harper government says the extended non-combat mission be redeployed until 2014.

U.S. army Lt.-Gen. William Caldwell, in an online paper for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, praised Canada's efforts to train the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police as "invaluable."

Additional Canadian trainers, he wrote, are especially needed in the Taliban-infested Kandahar region that 2,800 Canadian combat troops are to leave this year.

The government in November announced the combat mission, centred in Kandahar since 2006, will be replaced by about 1,000 Canadian Forces personnel who will train the Afghan National Army "behind the wire" in Kabul, the Afghan capital, until March 2014.

The move is seen as a way to reduce war casualties, and associated political liabilities, while satisfying U.S. and international calls not to abandon the Afghan mission. Moving the mission from Kandahar also fulfils a condition agreed to by Parliament when it voted in 2008 to extend the mission to 2011.

But Caldwell seems to take no notice.

"Your nation has the capabilities to provide more air mentor teams in Kandahar, police trainers in Kandahar, trainers at the ANA medical facility in Kandahar, and logistics facilities across the country," he wrote in the paper, dated December, but clearly written before the Nov. 16 announcement.

"Your forces are more broadly experienced than most other nations serving in the International Security Assistance Force, and such mature soldiers, with multiple tours serving in Afghanistan, would be extremely effective trainers for the" Afghan National Security Force.

Meanwhile, by the end of the year, NATO will have spent \$20 billion U.S. developing Afghan security forces since the start of 2010 and will maintain a training presence through at least 2016, Caldwell told the Washington Post last week.

Soaring illiteracy rates among service members and a shortage of specialized trainers, however, remain major hurdles as Afghans prepare to take control of securing their nation by the 2014 deadline for NATO's departure, said Caldwell.

"We have made great strides in providing the Afghan national security force with both capable and sustainable weapons, vehicles and equipment over this last year, while building a very strong and self-reliant security force," Caldwell said.

“We’re already seeing the results,” Caldwell said.

Those include the growth of the Afghan army, police and air force by about 70,000 people over the past 12 months.