Beat: News

Canada;s military ends mission in Afghanistan after 12 years

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USPA News - Canada`s armed forces formally ended their military operations in Afghanistan on Wednesday with a symbolic flag lowering ceremony at the Kabul headquarters of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), officials said. "Today, after more than twelve years and the deployment of over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members, our mission in Afghanistan has come to a close," said the Chief of Defense Staff, General Tom Lawson.

A small training mission in Kabul also ended on Wednesday, three years after Canadian combat troops withdrew from action. The flag lowering ceremony was attended by officials from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as diplomatic and Canadian dignitaries, including General Lawson and other senior leaders. "The end of the military mission and the lowering of the flag is a significant milestone in the fight against global terror," Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said. Canada initially committed troops to Afghanistan in 2001 to support U.S. operations in the wake of the September 11 attacks and returned in 2003 as part of the ISAF mission to conduct security operations in the Kabul area. In 2005, Canada took command of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team and deployed combat troops to the southern part of the country where they fought heavily against Taliban militants until 2011. "Over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members have fought to defeat the threat of terrorism and to ensure the freedom of others, to build a stronger, safer world. In the course of this fight, many have paid the ultimate price," said Harper. According to Canadian officials, nearly 160 Canadians were killed as a result of the long-standing conflict. ISAF said Canada was instrumental in developing a network of roads in key districts of Kandahar province, thereby improving economic conditions and extending the reach of governance. Senior Canadian officers also held high positions within ISAF, including General Rick Hillier who served as ISAF`s commander in 2004. "Canada played a critical role in securing Kandahar Province and had a strategic impact across the country with their contribution to the NATO training mission," said ISAF commander General Joseph Dunford, Jr. "Canadian personnel set an example for courage and compassion of which both Canada and NATO can be proud. On behalf of ISAF I extend our sincere thanks and gratitude for Canada?s outstanding service and sacrifice." Canada`s Minister of National Defense, Rob Nicholson, said that Canadians from coast to coast "are proud" of the contributions its military made in Afghanistan. "With our allies and government partners, the Canadian Armed Forces have helped to defend against terrorism and made a vital contribution international peace and security," Nicholson said. The last of the Canadian Armed Forces troops are expected to return home on the final flight from Afghanistan on March 18. "I look forward to welcoming home the last contingent of Canada`s brave men and women," said Harper. Although the military mission ended, Canada will continue to play an important role in Afghanistan`s future. As announced by Harper at the May 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, the Canadian government committed to providing $330 million to help sustain Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and $227 million in development assistance between 2015 and 2017. NATO forces in Afghanistan have a current strength of over 52,000 service members, including approximately 34,000 U.S. troops and 5,200 British soldiers. Most foreign troops are scheduled to leave the war-torn country at the end of the year as Afghan President Hamid Karzai has refused to sign a security deal with the United States that would permit foreign troops to remain in the country. In June 2013, Karzai announced the fifth and final phase of security transition in which coalition forces hand over control of the last 95 districts - including Taliban stronghold areas in the south and east - to Afghan security forces. ISAF troops will still be responsible for military air support as well as support in combat operations until the end of 2014.

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