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NATO in Afghanistan – European and Canadian Positions

TITLE: NATO in Afghanistan – European and Canadian Positions

COURSE: Canadian and World Politics (CPW4U)

TIME REQUIREMENTS: 90 minutes

DESCRIPTION:

Since 2002 Canada has been committed to NATO's mission in Afghanistan, which now constitutes the single biggest Canadian foreign policy priority. This lesson helps students make sense of Canada's role in NATO and the positions of other NATO members and shows some of the factors effecting states' foreign policies and their role in international organizations.

OBJECTIVES:

- Analyse how natural resources and human resources help to determine the power and influence of a country
- Explain the types of commitments made by Canada to other nations and international organizations
- Evaluate the effectiveness of selected international organizations
- Describe some important factors shaping Canadian foreign policy
- Evaluate the nature and quality of Canada's influence within selected world and regional organizations

MATERIALS:

- Teacher's Guide
- Handouts:

Handout #1: BBC News Profile: NATO (Online)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1549072.stm

Handout #2: BBC News Q&A: ISAF Troops in Afghanistan (online)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7228649.stm

Handout #3: Agence France Presse: NATO States Wrangle Over Afghanistan Troop Commitments (online)

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5i9OAYLgRuRIOy4oRrcTGwBsN87EA>

Handout #4: By the Numbers: NATO in Afghanistan (see page 4) 2 NATO in Afghanistan – European and Canadian Positions

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The following guidelines are to assist in delivering the material in this lesson plan. They are meant to have a certain amount of flexibility, to account for the amount of time available in the class, as well as to offer the option of a more classroom- or homework- focused approach.

1. Begin by going through **Handouts #1** and **#2** with the students to familiarize them with NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It will be useful to highlight the changes undergone by NATO since the end of the Cold War as an example of how international organizations can change over time as global circumstances change.

Some of the more important changes that should be highlighted include:

- a. The inclusion of former members of the Warsaw Pact
- b. The transition of NATO's regional role in Europe to a more international role
- c. The decrease in emphasis on NATO's role as a collective security organization

You may also wish to have a **mini-discussion** on the material so far, asking the students why they think these changes have occurred.

2. Next, distribute and have students read through **Handout #3** in small groups. This news article highlights in greater detail some of the conflicts between NATO members over the ISAF mission. Make sure students understand the main arguments of the article, as these will introduce the activity students will be doing based upon **Handout #4** and its discussion questions.

3. Pass out a copy of **Handout #4** to the students in their **small groups**. This handout provides information on NATO member countries and their troop contributions to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The table in the handout presents the size of each country's standing army (column 2), and the number of troops the country has stationed in Afghanistan in total (column 3) and as a percentage of their standing army (column 4). Have students read through this handout in their groups.

4. Once students have read through the handout, assign each group one of the attached questions. The task of each group is to do some research using the Internet to try and answer the questions as thoroughly as possible. This can be done as a **take-home assignment** if Internet access is not readily available.

- a. Included with the handout is a background sheet for students on some of the principle factors that affect the foreign and military policies of states to assist them with their research, as well as some internet resources to get them started.

5. Once students have completed their questions, give each group a chance to present their answers to the class. Other groups may be asked to give feedback on the answers to see if they can think of any factors the group might have missed. Students can then hand in a final copy of their group work in short essay format.

6. As a conclusion to the lesson, based upon what the students have learned through their research, the following questions can be discussed in class:

- a. Given the many different factors affecting the levels of commitment of the different NATO members, do you think Canada has much influence over its allies? If so, how?
- b. How do the different priorities and pressures faced by each NATO member affect the overall effectiveness of the organization in general, and with regard to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan in particular.

Handout #4:**By the Numbers: NATO in Afghanistan**

The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** is an alliance of countries which have decided to combine their military resources for the purpose of defending one another, as well as to provide a common forum to cooperate on international security issues. The biggest of these issues so far is NATO's commitment to the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

For an organization like NATO, however, the **ISAF** mission in Afghanistan represents some interesting challenges. First, all of NATO's member countries, even though some are far more powerful than others, have an equal vote on the commitments that organization will make. This means that all 26 members must agree before NATO can involve itself in a mission. But this isn't all. Even after all the members have agreed, each member can choose how much it is willing to contribute, and no other member can force it to contribute more.

As we can see in the table below, there are big differences in the resources committed by various NATO members in terms of soldiers to the ISAF mission. Using these numbers as a guide can help us to understand a number of things about which international and domestic factors affect the foreign policies of different countries, and how these in turn affect how successful international organizations will be.

Have a look at the table 'By the Numbers' below to familiarize yourself with how many troops each NATO member and candidate has committed in Afghanistan. Once you've had a look through these, you'll see a number of questions about these countries related to the table – you'll be assigned one of these to answer in as much detail as you can.

By the Numbers: Army Personnel of Select NATO Members (2009)			
	Total¹	ISAF²	ISAF %
Albania*	14,295	250	1.7%
Belgium	38,844	510	1.3%
Bulgaria	40,747	460	1.1%
Canada	64,371	2,830	4.4%
Croatia*	18,600	290	1.6%
Czech Republic	24,083	340	1.4%
Denmark	29,550	700	2.4%
Estonia	5,300	150	2.8%
France	352,771	3,070	0.9%
Germany	244,324	4,245	1.7%
Greece	156,600	125	0.1%
Hungary	25,207	310	1.2%
Iceland* **	130	8	6.2%
Italy	292,983	2,795	1.0%
Latvia	5,187	165	3.2%
Lithuania	8,850	250	2.8%

¹ Source: IISS. February, 2008. *The Military Balance 2009*. Vol. 109 No. 1.

² Source: <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf>

Luxembourg	900	9	1.0%
Netherlands	40,537	2,160	5.3%
Norway	19,100	600	3.1%
Poland	121,808	2,025	1.7%
Portugal	42,910	105	0.2%
Romania	73,200	990	1.4%
Slovakia	7,324	240	3.3%
Slovenia	7,200	80	1.1%
Spain	221,750	1,000	0.5%
Macedonia*	10,890	185	1.4%
Turkey*	510,600	820	0.2%
United Kingdom	160,280	9,000	8.4%
United States	1,539,587	31,855	2.1%
* = Candidates for NATO membership			
** = Iceland does not have a national military. Therefore all statistics for Iceland indicate paramilitary personnel (ex. Logistics and research).			

1. The **Total** column provides the total number of personnel in a country's armed forces.
2. The **ISAF** column provides the number of personnel a country has stationed in Afghanistan.
3. The **ISAF %** column provides the number of a country's personnel in Afghanistan as a percentage of the total soldiers in the armed forces of that country.

Questions

1. By percentage of available soldiers, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the biggest contributors to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons for this?
2. The lowest percentages of soldiers in Afghanistan come from Greece and Turkey. Can you think of some reasons why this might be the case? What effect does the relationship between these two countries have?
3. The United States has the largest number of troops in Afghanistan, but as a percentage of its total army its contribution is not among the largest. What are some of the reasons for this?
4. France and Germany are the two largest European military powers, but their troop contributions are among the smallest in terms of percentage. What are some of the reasons for this?
5. Can you think of any reasons for Germany not taking a larger role in Afghanistan, despite its material wealth and large military capacity? What might these tell us about factors that can affect a country's foreign policy?
6. Estonia and Latvia are two of NATO's smallest members, but their contributions represent a higher percentage than some of the largest members. What might explain this?
7. Some of the newer members of NATO such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, have a much smaller number of soldiers in Afghanistan than other new and old NATO members. What factors could be responsible for this?

Background for Answering Questions

There are many reasons why modern states have standing armies, but two are the most important. First, states have armed forces to defend themselves against other states. Second, states have armed forces as one of the tools they can use for advancing their foreign policy, by using them to threaten or

defend another country. While a state's military power is what we're primarily concerned with here, it's important to remember that this isn't the only – or even most commonly used – foreign policy tool states have. Wealth, natural resources and prestige are other important ones.

It is important to remember that armed forces, in NATO members and other states, are used according to the foreign policy goals of their country, and these goals are affected by a range of factors which we have to look at to make sense of any country's foreign policy. Some of the more important factors are outlined below to help you in answering your questions.

Economy: A strong economy is one of the most important factors in a state's foreign policy generally and its military commitments in particular. Armed forces cost billions of dollars every year to operate, and generally more if they operate outside of their own country. States with weak economies usually have smaller armed forces than richer states, and are less able to deploy them on foreign expeditions or peacekeeping missions.

Geography: Where a country is, and who its neighbours are, are also very important factors shaping foreign policy and military commitments. States with good relations with their neighbours may have to dedicate their military less to territorial defence and can better afford participation in peacekeeping or other military missions. On the other hand, states with poor relations or open conflicts with their neighbours may be less willing to commit large portions of their military to overseas missions, fearing that they may have to be used closer to home.

Domestic Politics: The type of political institutions a state has and the character of domestic politics both play a large role in its foreign and military policies. States with greater centralization of power in fewer hands may find it easier to commit to a certain policy than those where power is distributed among many institutions. In the latter case, even where one branch of government may want to commit to a policy, other branches might intervene to make this more difficult.

History: Every state has a different political history which influences its decisions. For example, some states have engaged in war more often than others, which may make it easier for the governments and people of those states to become involved in other military engagements. On the other hand, some countries' historical experience of war is viewed negatively by their people and governments, which makes them less ready to send their troops into other countries. Still, other states may have a history of participating in military engagements, but only under particular circumstances, such as where the United Nations is involved. For these states, the particulars of the conflict may play a large role in determining their participation.

Interests and Priorities: States, like individuals, have interests and priorities. The problem, of course, is that it is not always possible to pursue all of these at the same time, and so some become more important at certain times than others. Often circumstances outside of a state's control will determine which issues are priorities and which have to wait. If a country is facing economic troubles, even though military commitments to allies might be a priority, these may have to be set aside until the economy stabilizes. Finally, even though states come together in alliances and international organizations, their reasons for doing so may be different, and the interests of some may conflict with those of others. This can affect the willingness to dedicate resources. Remember, some states have much wider global interests than others, whose concerns are primarily local or regional.