

If Re-Elected Harper Government Would Expand Canada's Special Forces ... To be Deployed Internationally on Behalf of Pentagon

By [Yves Engler](#)

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Last week former defence minister Jason Kenney said if re-elected the Conservatives would significantly expand Canada's special forces. Kenney said they would add [665 members](#) to the Canadian Armed Forces Special Operations Command (CANSOFCOM) over the next seven years.

Why? What do these "special forces" do? Who decides when and where to deploy them? For what purpose? These are all questions left unanswered (and not even asked in the mainstream media).

What we do know is that since the mid-2000s Canada's special forces have steadily expanded to [1,900 members](#). In 2006 the military launched CANSOFCOM to oversee JTF2, the Special Operations Aviation Squadron, Canadian Joint Incident Response Unit and Special Operations Regiment. Begun that year, the Special Operations Regiment's 750 members receive similar training to JTF2 commandos, the most secretive and skilled unit of the Canadian Armed Forces. After having doubled from 300 to 600 men, JTF2 is set to move from Ottawa to a 400-acre compound near Trenton, Ontario, at a [cost of \\$350](#) million.

Though their operations are "[shrouded in secrecy](#)" — complained a 2006 Senate Committee on National Security and Defence — JTF2 commandos have been deployed on numerous occasions since the unit's establishment in 1993.

A number of media outlets reported that Canadian special forces fought in Libya in 2011 in contravention of UN Security Council resolution 1973, which explicitly forbade "[a foreign occupation](#) force of any form on any part of Libyan territory."

On February 29, 2004 JTF2 soldiers reportedly "[secured](#)" the airport from which Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was bundled ("kidnapped" in his words) onto a plane by US Marines and deposited in the Central African Republic.

After the 2003 US/British invasion JTF2 commandos were reported to be working alongside their British and US counterparts in Iraq. While Ottawa refused to [confirm or deny](#) JTF2 operations, in March 2006 the Pentagon and the British Foreign Office "[both commented](#)" on the instrumental role JTF2 played in rescuing the British and Canadian Christian Peace Activists that were being held hostage in Iraq."

[Nous étions invincibles](#), a book by a former JTF2 soldier Denis Morisset, describes his

mission to the Colombian jungle to rescue NGO and church workers “because FARC guerillas threatened the peace in the region.” The Canadian soldiers were unaware that they were transporting the son of a Colombian leader, which prompted the FARC to give chase for a couple days. On two different occasions the Canadian forces came under fire from FARC guerrillas. Two Canadian soldiers were injured in the firefight and immediately after the operation one of the wounded soldiers left the army with post-traumatic stress disorder. Ultimately, the Canadians were saved by US helicopters, as the JTF2 mission was part of a US initiative.

Morisset also provides a harrowing account of a 1996 operation to bring the Canadian General Maurice Baril, in charge of a short-lived UN force into eastern Zaire (Congo), to meet Rwandan backed rebel leader Laurent Kabila. The convoy came under fire upon which US Apache and Blackhawk helicopters launched a counterattack on the Congolese, rescuing their Canadian allies. Some thirty Congolese were killed by a combination of helicopter and JTF2 fire.

In late 2001 JTF2 secretly invaded Afghanistan, alongside US and British operatives. In the first six months of their operations, members of JTF2 claimed to have killed 115 Taliban or Al Qaida fighters and captured 107 Taliban leaders. By early 2002 the British began having doubts about the tactics used by Canadian and American special forces. In [Shadow Wars: Special Forces in the New Battle Against Terrorism](#) David Pugliese reports,

“The concern among the British was that the ongoing raids [by Americans and Canadians] were giving Afghans the impression that the coalition was just another invading foreign army that had no respect for the country’s culture or religion.”

According to documents CBC News obtained through access to information, a JTF2 member said he felt his commanders “[encouraged](#)” them to commit war crimes. The soldier, whose name was not released, claimed a fellow JTF2 member shot an Afghan with his hands raised in the act of surrender. The allegations of wrongdoing were first made to his superior officers in 2006 yet the military ombudsman didn’t begin investigating until June 2008. The JTF2 member told the ombudsman’s office “[that although](#) he reported what he witnessed to his chain of command, he does not believe they are investigating, and are being ‘very nice to him.’” After three and a half years, the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service cleared the commanders in December 2011. But they failed to release details of the allegations, including who was involved or when and where it happened. The public was supposed to simply trust the process.

It seems as if the Conservatives support special forces precisely because these elite units have close ties to their US counterparts and the government is not required to divulge information about their operations. Ottawa can deploy these troops abroad and the public is none the wiser. “Deniability,” according to Major B. J. Brister, is why the federal government prefers special operation forces.

*Author of the just-released [Canada In Africa: 300 years of aid and exploitation](#) **Yves Engler** will be speaking across the country in the lead up to the election. For information: [Yvesengler.com](#)*

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