



## Canadian lawmakers reject exit date from Afghanistan

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TORONTO/KABUL - The Associated Press

Canada's Parliament has narrowly defeated a motion calling for the country to pull its 2,500 troops out of the NATO alliance fighting in [Afghanistan](#) by 2009. The motion, which would have been non-binding, was brought forward Tuesday by Liberal opposition lawmakers who have been pushing for a troop withdrawal as the Canadian death toll has steadily mounted. Fifty-four Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed thus far in Afghanistan.

The motion was aimed at guaranteeing the combat mission wouldn't be extended beyond the current commitment, which is scheduled to end in February 2009.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government opposed it because the administration refuses to be tied to a firm exit date. The motion was defeated 150-134.

The Conservatives were joined in defeating the motion by the New Democrats, who want Canadian soldiers to immediately cease combat duty in the increasingly violent Kandahar province.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said both positions are irresponsible. He said Harper wants to keep Canada involved in "an open-ended war" that could drag on for years. By 2009, [Dion](#) said, the troops will have been fighting in Kandahar for four years, amounting to "the longest combat mission" in recent Canadian history. He said it will be time at that point for other NATO partners to take up the battle against Taliban insurgents.

The vote came two weeks after eight Canadian soldiers were killed in Afghanistan on Easter weekend.

### **NATO pulls disputed ad:**

Meanwhile, NATO said yesterday that it has withdrawn a radio message telling Afghan farmers that its troops will not destroy their opium fields, following complaints that the alliance appeared to condone the illicit crop.

The advertisement was paid for by the NATO-led International [Security](#) Assistance Force and aired on [radio stations](#) in Helmand province, the largest opium-producing area in the world and the focus of NATO's biggest ever anti-Taliban offensive.

"This was an error by ISAF," said Zalmay Afzali, a spokesman for Afghanistan's Ministry for Counter Narcotics. "We request from ISAF to avoid these kind of errors in the future because it can create a hell of a problem for the counter-narcotics strategy of Afghanistan," Afzali said.

ISAF spokeswoman Lt. Col. Angela Billings said that the "poorly worded address" was taken off air on Tuesday.

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