

## Canadian and Dutch Publics Feeling Stretched by Expanded Military Role in Afghanistan

May 26, 2006



Canada and the Netherlands are grappling with the demands of an increasingly hazardous mission in Afghanistan as NATO forces come into more direct combat with the Taliban. While the Canadian and Dutch publics have been supportive of participation in the Afghan operation, there are signs that they are feeling stretched by their forces' more dangerous role.

*A Canadian soldier from Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, visits the Maywand District, Afghanistan, April 10, 2006. (U.S. Army photo/Spc. Leslie Angulo)*

At the start of the Canadian deployment in Afghanistan, 66 percent favored the mission, an Ipsos-Reid survey found in January 2002. Similarly, 66 percent of the Dutch supported having their troops in Afghanistan two years ago, according to a poll by the [German Marshall Fund](#).

A poll of Canadians taken this month by Ipsos-Reid, however, shows that support for having troops in Afghanistan has slipped to 57%. Polls by [Ekos Research Associates](#) have also shown a downward movement with support dropping from 76% in September 2005, to 70% in February 2006 and 62% in April.

More importantly, Canadians showed resistance to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's proposal to commit to extending the mission by two years. Ipsos asked those in favor of having troops in Afghanistan whether they also supported the Prime Minister's plan to extend their stay. One out of five said no, meaning that only 44% of the total sample approved of the plan.

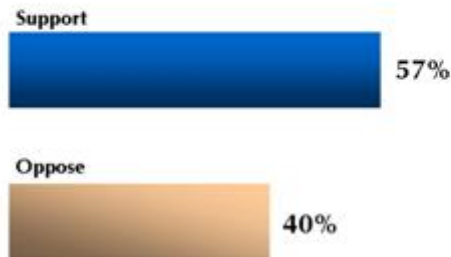
In January when the Dutch government was in the throes of a debate over whether to increase their forces in Afghanistan above the approximately 600 deployed there last year, TNS NIPO found only 33 percent of the Dutch supported sending more troops. Forty-five percent of the Dutch were opposed.

Both the Canadian and Dutch governments have proceeded with the proposed deployments. Harper narrowly won parliamentary approval for a two-year extension of his country's mission in Afghanistan by a vote of 149-145 on May 17. The parliamentary debate took place as Canadian soldiers fought Taliban forces in the southern province of Kandahar, where they took over operations from the United States earlier this month. Among the dead was Captain Nichola Goddard, who became Canada's sixteenth military casualty in Afghanistan and the first

Canadian woman to die in combat since World War II: Some 2,300 Canadian troops are now serving in Afghanistan as part of a 9,000-strong NATO contingent.

### Canadian Support for Troops in Afghanistan

*Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of Canada's troops for security and combat efforts against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan?*



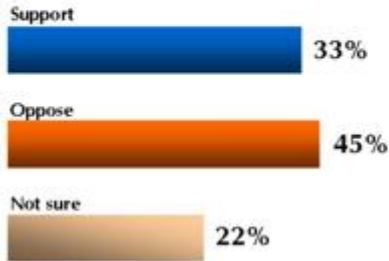
The Dutch cabinet approved sending up to 1,400 troops to Afghanistan for two years in February after months of uncertainty as the issue was debated in parliament. Under Dutch law, the deployment had to be approved by all of the parties in the governing coalition. One of the three coalition members had objected to the deployment of troops, whose principal mission is reconstruction, to areas where they might be drawn into combat.

NATO has agreed to move forces formerly stationed principally in the capital of Kabul to more dangerous parts of Afghanistan to replace U.S. troops. The redeployment has coincided with some of the fiercest fighting in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S. invasion, as Taliban fighters step up their attacks on foreign forces.

The mission in Afghanistan enjoyed majority support among most of the European nations polled in the 2004 survey. The Dutch were the most supportive (66 percent) followed by the Germans (59 percent), Italians (56 percent), French (55 percent) and the British (50 percent). Americans were even more enthusiastic about the Afghan mission: 69 percent said they supported having troops there. However, lower levels of support were found in Poland (24 percent), Portugal (41 percent) and Spain (48 percent).

## Dutch Support for Additional Troop Deployment to Afghanistan

*Do you support or oppose the deployment of an additional 1,200 troops to Afghanistan to take part in a peacekeeping and reconstruction mission?*



THE INFO 100 NATO's Afghan mission is still more popular than the U.S.-led coalition's operations in Iraq. Majorities in five of the United States' military partners in Iraq have called for the withdrawal of their forces. [Polls conducted last year](#) indicated that 57 percent of the British favored pulling their troops out of Iraq, though they did not necessarily want an immediate withdrawal. Sixty percent of Italians said they opposed extending their troops' presence in Iraq. Fifty-nine percent of Poles wanted their troops out as soon as possible as did 48 percent of Danes. Australians (53 percent) and Japanese (56 percent) also wanted to bring their forces back.