

# Soldiers' deaths in Afghanistan the price of leadership: Harper

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[CBC News](#)

Prime Minister Stephen Harper says the toll of Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan is the price Canada is paying for playing a leadership role in world affairs.

Speaking in Calgary on Thursday night, Harper praised Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, saying they are well aware of the risks involved in their work there.

"The Canadian men and women who serve there have gone willingly, knowing that not all of them will return," he said.

"When I went to Afghanistan and visited our troops there, I saw — as anyone could see first-hand there on the ground — just how dedicated, professional, skilled and courageous they are."

Thirty-nine Canadian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since Canada first sent troops there in early 2002.

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his wife Laureen on stage with his Woodrow Wilson Award for public service following a ceremony in Calgary on Thursday.

(Jeff McIntosh/Canadian Press)

"We see just how proud Canadians are of their soldiers and their families and we have also seen how difficult it is to bear the sorrows of their losses. But, ladies and gentlemen, that is the price of leadership in the world," Harper told the audience.

"It is also the price of moving the world forward."

Harper was in Calgary to receive the Woodrow Wilson Award for public service. He said Canadians want their country to be confident and to take a clear role in the world, even if it is not always the safest path.

They want "a Canada that doesn't just criticize, but one that can contribute," he said. "They want a Canada that reflects their values and interests, and that punches above its weight."

### **Soldiers' remains to arrive Friday evening**

Harper, whose government was criticized by a Senate committee on Thursday for not doing a good job of explaining Canada's mission in Afghanistan, made his comments as the bodies of two Canadian soldiers were on their way back home to Canada.

Sgt. Craig Paul Gillam and Cpl. Robert Thomas James Mitchell were killed on Tuesday. They were both members of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, based in Petawawa, Ont. Their bodies were expected to arrive at 7 p.m. ET at CFB Trenton in eastern Ontario.

Gillam and Mitchell were providing security for a road construction project about 20 kilometres west of Kandahar when a handful of insurgents armed with rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles attacked. Gillam and Mitchell were killed in the attack, which also left five other soldiers wounded.

They were the 38th and 39th Canadian soldiers to die in Afghanistan since 2002, when Canada first contributed troops to help stabilize the country for reconstruction.

Canada has more than 2,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, the majority stationed in the southern province of Kandahar.

*With files from the Canadian Press*