

## Time to 'kick-start' more effective development in Afghanistan: Harper

17 hours ago

BERWICK, N.S. — Prime Minister Stephen Harper says his definition of victory in Afghanistan would be to push back the Taliban insurgency to the point where NATO nations can "kick-start much more effective" development in the war-torn country.

Harper told a news conference on Friday that the goal should be to "put the responsibility for day-to-day security" in the hands of the Afghans themselves.

He repeated his message - recently made on the CNN television network - that victory will not mean destroying the Taliban.

Instead, the prime minister said his definition of victory is more complex.

"I think that what is realistic is that we would considerably push back the insurgency ... and that we diminish the security threats significantly enough that we can kick-start a much more effective effort on development and aid," he said after a highway funding announcement in Berwick, N.S.

Opposition MPs attacked Harper in the House of Commons on Monday for what they claim is a 180-degree turn on the Afghan mission.

They referred to the prime minister's March 2006 visit to Afghanistan when he told soldiers Canada wouldn't turn tail when the going got tough.

Harper said Friday he's "amused" by opposition questions that "imply our government ... has only two options: to fight the insurgency or surrender."

"You can actually have an aggressive stance towards the insurgency, which NATO has had, while at the same time promoting other political and governance developments, which may help with more peaceful solutions down the road," he said.

"I think you have to actually do a bit of both."

The Conservatives have maintained for some time that building up Afghanistan's fledgling security forces to the point where they can keep the Taliban at bay is the Canadian military's end game in Afghanistan.

However, following last year's report by former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley and his blue-ribbon panel of experts, the Tories also began emphasizing reconstruction and development as equally important pillars of the Afghan mission.

Parliament agreed last year to extend the military mission in volatile Kandahar province to 2011 beyond the initial 2009 end date.

Some 2,750 Canadian soldiers are deployed to Kandahar province, a beachhead in the bloody battle against a stubborn Taliban insurgency. Canada's death toll stands at 111 since the Afghan mission began in 2002.

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