



## **In Focus Transatlantic News Digest** *Electronic Newsletter of the Atlantic Council of Canada*

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**Editors: Tanah SULLIVAN and Monika WYRZYKOWSKA**

**Contact:** [tanah.sullivan@atlantic-council.ca](mailto:tanah.sullivan@atlantic-council.ca)  
[monika.wyrzykowska@utoronto.ca](mailto:monika.wyrzykowska@utoronto.ca)

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### **Reinforcing the Afghan Army**

**By: Tanah Sullivan**

A report by Reuters published on May 20, 2010, asserts that NATO has intensified its training of Afghan forces with the aim of reforming the Afghan National Army (ANA), a force which up to now inspired little confidence from the Afghan population. Since the fall of the Taliban, there has been constant dispute between President Hamid Karzai and international backers over the type of army Afghanistan will need to rebuild itself. Many are speculating as to whether the ANA will be able to function independently with critical structural flaws, disparate interests and internal fragmentation as prevalent issues. Along with corruption and political factionalism, these issues have become top priorities of the Afghan national security strategy, with NATO troops reportedly remaining past the 2011 withdrawal deadline to offer training and knowledge to build a unified Afghan military force.

According to US Lieutenant-General William Caldwell, by aiming to decrease the high drop-out rates, incompetence and drug use amongst the trainees, NATO is hoping to garner local support for the ANA from the Afghan population. Lieutenant-General Caldwell is the head of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) and highlights the 80% illiteracy rate, corruption and a lack of trained personnel as the biggest obstacles to the implementation of a successful, effective Afghan force. The mission is hoping to have over 300,000 Afghan army and police trained by 2011; although at the moment only 45% of Afghan police have had any formal preparation.

Professionalizing the police has been identified as one of the toughest challenges for NTM-A trainers. This includes educating the trainees about their role and responsibilities to the local population, as according to Lieutenant-General Caldwell, "they haven't been taught human rights, they haven't been instilled with this idea that they serve the people." Underestimating the ANA's strategic role in rebuilding Afghanistan would be an additional hindrance to the burdened Afghan government, which is inundated with pre-existing issues. The push to build a unified national military in service of a civilian government has frequently clashed with the

tendency to create militias in a bid to insulate the state from internal and external threats. The tension between these conflicting conceptions has had significant implications not only for Afghanistan's internal security but also its foreign relations.

Despite all the challenges, NATO has begun to lay out a comprehensive training plan for the Afghan police and military through the NTM-A, which is an integral part of NATO's road map to transferring control of security to Afghan forces so that ISAF troops can begin withdrawing in 2011. In response to the low literacy rates amongst Afghan cadets, NATO has already introduced mandatory reading and writing programs for army and police trainees, although the ambitions are deemed 'modest' as the cadets only need to achieve a third-grade level of reading and writing.

Courses such as the *NATO Weapons Training Course*, from which the first graduation of Afghan cadets took place on May 15, 2010, are essential to the development of the Afghan military and police force. The course was a part of a ten week training curriculum to prepare Afghan personnel as technical experts. The Afghan Military Central Workshop is located in Kabul, and is just one of the many centers offering training programs aimed at ensuring a successful transition of security responsibilities from NATO to Afghan forces. Through programs, training centers and courses such as these, NTM-A personnel are committed to equipping the ANA with the required knowledge and skills to train the next generations of Afghan soldiers as a part of the journey towards building an independent, stable Afghanistan.

**Sources:** [Illiteracy, corruption hamper Afghan Police](#), [Most Afghans want NATO to remove Taliban](#), [Why we must not leave Afghanistan yet](#)

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## **Will the Polish Plane Crash Tragedy cause improved Polish-Russian Relations?**

**By: Monika Wyrzykowska**

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, just nine days after the tragic plane crash that took the lives of Polish President Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria along with 94 other senior Polish officials, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen welcomed the Russian attitude toward relations with Poland by stating the following during a press briefing in Brussels:

"It is clear to me that Russia is making every possible effort to be a friend to the Polish people in this difficult time... I also warmly welcome the partnership between Poland and Russia in the aftermath of this terrible tragedy... It is a powerful signal of how far Europe has come, in a short time, in healing the wounds of the past, ... It is also, I believe, a clear demonstration that we can build a better, more united future."

The late President, who was an unabashed Atlanticist, harboured a sense of distrust towards Russia as well as Poland's western neighbour, Germany. This fear was, amongst other reasons, exasperated by the projected Russian-German Nord Stream gas pipeline beneath the Baltic Sea, bypassing Poland and undermining its energy security. A thorn in Russia's side, Kaczyński was one of the main proponents of the inclusion in NATO of Georgia and Ukraine. When Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008, the Polish President surprised the EU when he called on other sympathetic Eastern European leaders to show their support by going to Tbilisi, the Georgian capital.

Kaczyński perceived Poland's involvement in western institutions, including NATO, mostly as a means to military protection from Russia. Even so, Kaczyński's then-ruling Law and Justice Party claimed that the collective security guarantees offered by NATO Treaty's Article V were not enough to counter current threats. Kaczyński pursued closer bilateral relations with the U.S., resulting in the deal with the Bush administration deal to base interceptor missiles in Poland as part of a missile defence shield to counter what it described as potential threats from rogue states such as Iran.

Moscow claimed that the project could jeopardize its own defences and reacted with a number of threats, such as moving missiles into Kaliningrad near the Polish border. In the long run however, the Obama administration abandoned the project, but not before it further deepened the atmosphere of distrust between Russia and Poland.

After the 2007 elections in Poland, the Civic Platform took power on the promise of setting in motion a dialogue with Russia. The Minister of National Defence, Bogdan Klich, called for a more independent European Union policy on security, while at the same time underlining the need to redefine the relationship with NATO and strengthen transatlantic co-operation. Under the leadership of current Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Poland had a huge diplomatic breakthrough with Russia by successfully inviting Mr. Putin to a joint commemoration ceremony of the Katyń massacre – a horrendous Stalinist crime during which 22,000 Polish officers were mass murdered in the spring of 1940.

Unfortunately that ceremony never took place. Mr. Kaczynski, along with almost the entire foreign-policy leadership of his party, the commanders of the army, navy, air force and Special Forces, senior intelligence veterans and top historians, were on their way to that ceremony when their plane crashed on April 10<sup>th</sup> at Smolensk Military Air Base, tragically, not far from Katyń itself. The loss of much of the country's elite drew immediate parallels to the Katyń massacre. What followed however was unprecedented in the two countries' recent history; a massive outpouring of sympathy from ordinary Russians as well as empathetic gestures from the Russian leadership was received with open hearts by the Poles.

Yet even so, the country's mourning was mixed with rumours and some conspiracy theories about the possible causes for the crash, and since the details about the true cause of the catastrophe will not be known before the elections, no scenario can be dismissed as false. Professor Andrzej Zieniewicz, an anthropologist and literary historian notes that the post-catastrophic tension is fertile ground for old complexes, phobias, and stereotypes to come forth.

Many observers, including NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, speculate that, in light of the recent tragedy, Polish-Russian relations could become closer. Yet there are still those who believe that history may continue to play a defining role in Poland's (often negative) perception of Russian interests. The upcoming Polish presidential elections scheduled for June 20, 2010 will bring to light whether the Polish voters will be bogged down by old complexes or whether they will mark a true turning point in Polish-Russian relations.

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, the late President's twin brother Jaroslaw Kaczyński announced his candidacy for presidency, in order to "finish the mission" of the deceased President. His main competition is the Parliamentary Speaker and acting head of state, Bronislaw Komorowski, from the ruling liberal-conservative Civic Platform, who was originally preparing to run against the late Lech Kaczyński in the elections scheduled for October 2010. Unlike the late Kaczyński, Komorowski is an advocate for better ties with Russia.

Some believe that a victory for Mr. Komorowski would also make foreign policy run more smoothly. The Polish constitution is unclear about where the real responsibility for foreign policy lies. Prime Minister Tusk and the late President Kaczyński often squabbled publicly over who should attend EU summit meetings, for example. Mr. Tusk's aim is to reduce the presidential veto powers to ultimately create a more ceremonial post.

Poland's NATO policy in the wake of the tragedy is not expected to change significantly. Even so, relations with Russia are up for review. Kaczyński's absence as a supporter for Georgian membership to NATO already appears to be delivering a hard blow to the Saakashvili administration. Georgia is now the only former Soviet state actively seeking NATO membership. Russia continues to adamantly oppose the idea of Georgia's membership to NATO. On April 2, Ukraine, which recently elected a pro-Russian president, disbanded a government commission charged with overseeing the country's NATO integration efforts.

Although support for a Russo-Polish dialogue is expressed by the general public in Poland, the socially conservative and patriotic constituency that voted for the late Kaczyński is still to be reckoned with.

According to a recent poll conducted by Millward Brown SMG/KRC for the television station TVN24, Komorowski is still in the lead, even though his numbers have decreased.

Whether there is a silver lining of closer Polish-Russian relations in the recent tragedy remains to be seen. One thing is clear; the attitudes of the Polish leadership will continue to impact the NATO-Russia relationship, whether they will be redefined by co-operation and partnership or distrust and indecision.

[NATO Secretary General welcomes Russian attitude toward relations with Poland. The death of Poland's president carries a terrible echo of his country's past, Polskie kompleksy, Jaroslaw Kaczynski kandidiert bei Präsidentenwahlen, Georgia: Tbilisi Mourns Polish President Kaczynski's Death, Wahlen in Polen: Komorowskis Vorsprung vor Kaczynski schrumpft - Umfrage](#)

**Sources:** The Economist, Der Standard, Eurasianet.org, Newsweek.pl, RIA Novosti

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## Plane Wreckage Found in Afghanistan

**By: Tanah Sullivan**

In another setback for a return to relative normalcy for the Afghan people, Afghan National Army Air Corps and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force rescuers have found the tail of a passenger plane that crashed on Monday, 17 May, 2010. According to transport ministry spokesman Nagyalai Qalatwal, NATO and Afghan rescuers have located the tail end of the *Pamir Airways* plane 20 kilometres from Kabul on Thursday, 20 May, 2010. The crash occurred when an ageing *Antonov 24* turboprop plane went down 120 kilometers north of Kabul, in the Shakar Dara Mountains.

The passenger plane was carrying six crew members and 38 passengers, including three British citizens, one American, three Pakistanis and several high-ranking Afghan officials. It was en route from Kunduz to Kabul when it lost radio contact during bad weather and went down. Despite ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi stating earlier on Thursday that it was too early to assume all on board had perished, the Ministry of Defence has already ordered the Afghan Air Force to assist in transporting the victims' bodies back to their respective provinces. However, Pakistani-based news agency the *Daily Times* has reported that the Pakistani embassy in Kabul has done nothing to transport the bodies of Pakistani-Afghans on board the flight. *Pamir Airways* owner Khalilullah Ziayee has also reportedly informed Afghan television that the families of victims would each receive 100 000 dollars in compensation.

Several plane crashes have occurred in the last few years in Afghanistan, although most have been military aircraft. Commercial aviation incidents do not occur often in Afghanistan, and travelling by road is considered dangerous due to the Taliban insurgency. Heavy snow and fog are possible causes of the crash, although the final cause is still unclear. ISAF dispatched a plane and two helicopters in the area to assist in the search.

**Sources:** [Searchers find Afghan plane wreckage, Part found from Afghan plane crash, Afghan plane crash found near Kabul: officials, Afghan Pamir Airways plane wreckage 'spotted', Pakistani Afghans complain a lack of support by embassy, Crashed passenger plane found in Afghanistan](#)

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## Recommended Readings

### **Russia, NATO and Europe: Marching Through the Red Square (The Economist)**

On May 9, 2010, soldiers from NATO countries, including the United States, Britain and Poland, marched across Red Square in Russia's Victory Day parade. Beethoven's "Ode to Joy", the anthem of the

European Union, was played along with the Soviet-era national anthem. Military parades are symbolic and the Kremlin has long put Russia's wartime victory at the centre of its post-Soviet identity. But this parade was meant to project the image of a self-confident, powerful country seeking better relations with the West. [Read more here.](#)

### **Taliban attack biggest NATO base in Afghanistan (The New York Post)**

The number of insurgents killed during a brazen attack by Taliban militants on the largest NATO base in Afghanistan rose to 16, *Fox News Channel* reported Friday. Seven NATO soldiers were wounded in the attack, and five insurgents were detained. Taliban militants armed with rockets, guns and grenades attacked Bagram air base on Wednesday, a day after a suicide car bombing killed five US soldiers, a Canadian colonel and 12 Afghans, *AFP* reported.

Among those killed in the car bombing were four high-ranking NATO officers who were in Kabul on a brief visit: two full colonels, one American and the Canadian; and two American lieutenant colonels. [Read more here.](#)

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