



## In Focus Transatlantic News Digest

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### Commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan removed from position

By: **Monika Wyrzykowska**

Brigadier-General Daniel Ménard, Commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and Head of the Joint-Task Force Afghanistan, has been removed from his position for alleged inappropriate conduct related to the military's relationships and fraternization rules, and the apparent resulting loss of confidence in his "capacity to command". Ménard, married with two children, is accused of "inappropriate conduct" involving a female soldier. He was to direct NATO's potentially decisive campaign this summer in Kandahar City and four nearby districts, including the volatile Panjwaii, which many believe to be the most critical of the eight-year war against the Taliban.

The scandal follows an incident last March in which the Brigadier-General accidentally fired his rifle as he was about to board a US Army helicopter with General Walter Natynczyk, the Chief of the Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces. Pleading guilty last week at a court martial in Gatineau, Que., he was subsequently fined \$3,500 and had only returned to Kandahar last Thursday evening after three weeks of leave in Canada.

The commander of HMCS Fredericton, Cmdr. Steve Waddell, hopes the incident will not cause the Canadian public to lose faith in its military.

The matter is now under investigation. Several Canadian news media have questioned whether the military is holding its members to a higher moral standard than is necessary to perform their duties.

In the interim, Col. Simon Hetherington has been designated as acting commander until Brigadier-General Jonathan Vance, the former commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan, can take over operations.

**Sources:** [Was to have led biggest campaign by NATO](#), [Commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan sacked](#), [Upcoming battle in Afghanistan our 'D-day'](#), [Allegations against officer an isolated incident](#), [The military has acted hastily](#), [Held to a higher standard](#)

## **Israel's Prime Minister cuts visit to Ottawa short after flotilla tragedy**

**By: Tanah Sullivan**

On Sunday, May 30, 2010, a flotilla of ships delivering humanitarian supplies to Gaza was intercepted by the Israeli naval forces. The fighting that ensued resulted in a significant number of Turkish NGO workers and activists left injured or dead. There is growing international condemnation surrounding the clash, with protests taking place around the world over Israel's actions as the tragedy escalates into an international crisis. On Monday, May 31, 2010, over 1000 protesters gathered in downtown Toronto to add their voices to the increasing international outrage. As the raid occurred in international waters, many are calling Israel's actions everything from piracy to a war crime.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is already responding to the condemnations, launching a defensive campaign and asserting that global protests against Israel are unfounded without all the information. Israel has claimed that the ships were searched as they believed there were weapons on board. Both President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Stephen Harper have requested more information, and Prime Minister Netanyahu has confirmed that more details will emerge soon. The United Nations Security Council met on Monday to hold an emergency meeting over the crisis.

Since the raid, the media has portrayed thousands of people in a collective show of outrage all over the world. There are reports that this is only the beginning, as Israel prepares to defend itself against the global condemnation of its actions. At the request of Turkey, NATO will be holding a meeting of permanent representatives in Brussels on Tuesday, June 1, 2010, with Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stating he was "deeply concerned with the loss of lives".

**Sources:** [Has Israel lost lone regional Muslim ally Turkey? Turkey Alliance with Israel may rupture on Gaza raid](#) , [After Turkey demand, NATO to meet over Israeli attack](#) , [NATO to meet Tuesday on Gaza flotilla raid by Israel](#)

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## **NATO Forces calm ethnic unrest following local election in Kosovo**

**By: Monika Wyrzykowska**

On Sunday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, NATO's peace enforcement operation, Kosovo Force (KFOR), and European Union police units were deployed in Mitrovica, an ethnically split city in northern Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians were protesting against Serb local elections, backed by Belgrade, in the northern part of the country where Kosovo's central government has no authority. A spokesperson for the Kosovo Police, Besim Hoti, stated that the police "have used a small amount of tear gas and intervened to stop groups of Serbs and Albanians and prevent a further escalation of violence." KFOR and EU police officers were deployed on the Ibar river bridge, which separates the northern part of the city, controlled by the ethnic Serb minority from the southern, Albanian-controlled part.

These incidents are the most serious since Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in February 2008. Belgrade has not recognized Kosovo's independence, although about 70 nations, including Canada, have. Kosovo is a former province of southern Serbia, whose majority population is made up of ethnic Albanians.

KFOR, which has 10,000 troops deployed in the terrain, has repeated that it will not tolerate any violence. NATO spokesperson Anthony Pfau, stated that KFOR "...will pursue our mandate and in case of any trouble that may jeopardize the safety and security environment and the freedom of movement, we will take all necessary measures to reinstall calm."

Some 120,000 Kosovo Serbs still refuse to co-operate with Kosovo institutions and the EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo) force. The situation in northern Kosovo remains precarious two years after the country's independence and nine years after NATO bombardments against Serb forces to stop attacks against the civilian Albanian population.

State secretary in the Ministry for Kosovo-Metohija, Oliver Ivanović, assessed that despite the incidents, the local elections passed in a good atmosphere.

Sources: [Kosovo : les troupes de l'Otan interviennent à Mitrovica](#), [Serbs, Albanians clash during Kosovo protest](#), [Graves incidents à Mitrovica au Kosovo](#), [Ivanovic on elections in northern Kosovska Mitrovica](#)

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## **The Cost of the Taliban Offensive**

**By: Tanah Sullivan**

On Saturday, May 21, 2010, Kandahar Airfield, home to the largest contingent of Canadian and ISAF troops in southern Afghanistan, was attacked by Taliban insurgents. The attack started at 8 o'clock local time with a volley of about five rockets that hit the airfield, which is considered unusual compared to the more common single rocket attacks. A ground attack was also launched, involving rockets and mortar fire across Kandahar Airfield.

NATO officials have made a statement that International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) personnel have been injured, but no further information has been released. According to ISAF spokesman and Squadron Leader Paul Scott, NATO officials have begun an investigation into the attack, and there has been increased security with additional NATO personnel patrolling the already heavily-fortified base.

This is the first time there has been a ground attack at the Kandahar Airfield, although the rocket component of the attack is a regular occurrence. The rockets have generally been used as a form of harassment, and usually do not cause significant damage. Saturday's attack saw the insurgents get closer than they normally do, and many analysts are saying that the attack was more of an information and psychological operation than it was to gain military strategic ground.

The Helmand Blog, a British-based website, posted information regarding Saturday's attack by reporting that soldiers, including some Canadians, had been wounded in the attack. The blog entry was removed soon after, as ISAF asserted that the information posted was incorrect and without approval.

Saturday's attack comes just days after an attack on Bagram Airfield, which wounded nine NATO soldiers. The siege lasted more than eight hours, and killed an American contractor. On May 18, 2010, the day before the attack in Bagram, a NATO convoy in Kabul was attacked by a suicide bomber. The attack killed 18 people, including Col. Geoff Parker, the highest-ranking Canadian soldier to die in Afghanistan. Seven people have been arrested in connection with the attack, with the Afghan Intelligence Service announcing that the arrests were made separately over a few days.

On Monday, May 24, 2010, Trooper Larry Rudd became the fourth Canadian casualty to die in Afghanistan this month. Rudd was killed when the vehicle he was travelling in drove over an improvised explosive device near the village of Salavat, approximately 20 kilometers southwest of Kandahar City.

On May 26, 2010, a car bomb exploded outside Camp Nathan Smith, a NATO base located just inside Kabul and home to the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Spokesmen from the Afghan Interior Ministry and for the NATO-led forces in Kabul have confirmed that there were neither foreign nor local casualties.

The recent wave of attacks is part of the Taliban offensive that has been launched against foreign military and civilian persons in Afghanistan. The increased insurgency in Kandahar, launched by the Taliban two weeks ago, is seen as a response to the planned surge of troops by the US to 'flush out' the Taliban from its strongholds in the province of Kandahar. The strategic importance of Kandahar City is not only military, as it is also the spiritual home of the Taliban. NATO's Brigadier-General Josef Blotz asserted that Kandahar was "the main effort", for both ISAF and the Afghan government.

Sources: [Car bomb strikes outside Kandahar NATO base](#), [IED Blast Kills Canadian Soldier in Afghanistan](#), [Colonel Geoff Parker, soldier killed by bomber in Afghanistan](#), [Canadian soldier killed in Kabul identified as Colonel Geoff Parker](#), [NATO soldiers bid farewell to slain Canadian](#), [Ramp ceremony for fallen soldier](#), [Bagram attack kills US contractor, wounds nine NATO soldiers](#)

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## Macedonia Courting NATO with Regional Conference

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

Macedonia's Defense Ministry is currently hosting a two day Regional Conference on NATO integration in SEE (South-Eastern Europe): *Developing a Common Transatlantic Vision and Future Perspectives, May 31-June 1, 2010*. The aim of the meeting is to contribute to SEE countries' efforts in their Euro-Atlantic integration processes by encouraging them to exchange information, views and lessons learned. Defence ministers and top defence officials from 11 countries, including Albania, Croatia, Slovenia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, as well as representatives of the Regional Centre for Security Co-operation, the EU and NATO Command in Naples are attending the event.

Macedonia's efforts to join NATO and the EU have been blocked by Greece's opposition to its northern neighbor's using the name Macedonia, arguing that it implies territorial claims against its own northern province of Macedonia. Greece recognizes the country under the name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The dispute has dogged the two neighbors for the past 19 years. In 2008, Greece went so far as to state that it would veto NATO membership for Macedonia if the country didn't change its name.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has said that Macedonia should continue with reforms aimed at NATO entry, expressing confidence that these efforts will end in success. At a meeting with Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski at NATO headquarters in Brussels in January 2010, Rasmussen said that Macedonia's accession to NATO depends on the settlement of its name dispute with Greece. He added that the faster this issue is resolved, the faster Macedonia will become part of the Alliance.

Macedonia's NATO bid has received support from Romanian President Traian Basescu and Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nikolay Mladenov as recently as May 2010.

Macedonian newspaper *Vreme* reports that Rasmussen will visit Skopje on June 18 to check on the progress in resolving the name dispute. If Skopje and Athens manage to resolve the name issue before November, Macedonia would receive an invitation for NATO membership at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, in November.

Rasmussen's visit is planned following the session of the Council of the European Union, during which a decision will be made whether Macedonia should be given a date for start of the pre-accession talks with EU. This step would give the two countries a new deadline to work out the name issue.

**Sources:** [Regional Conference for NATO integration bring together most Balkan Countries](#), [Macedonia could expect and invitation for NATO membership in November](#), [Romania supports Macedonia's bids to join NATO, EU](#), [Bulgaria says supports Macedonia's integration into EU, NATO](#), [Rasmussen: NATO door still open for Macedonia](#), [NATO Wannabe Macedonia Demands 'Freedom and Justice'](#)

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### Recommended Readings:

#### British Support of NATO Mission Under Question

There have been new questions of Britain's support of the NATO mission in Afghanistan after some controversial remarks made by Defence Minister Liam Fox. Minister Fox referred to Afghanistan as a "13th Century country" and that he would like to bring British forces home as soon as possible. After a meeting on May 20, 2010, with Afghan president Hamid Karzai, Minister Fox stated that he would not set a date for British withdrawal. The new British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, formed after the May 6, 2010, elections has stated that the strategy for Afghanistan is amongst its top priorities.

**Reading:** [Liam Fox and Andrew Mitchell in Rift over Afghanistan, Fox says no change in Afghan policy](#)

#### NATO and Afghan Forces successfully recapture Taliban area

On June 1, 2010, joint NATO and Afghan troops recaptured the area of *Bargi Matal* in Nuristan province, located near the Afghan border with Pakistan. Taliban militants had overtaken the area after days of fighting, and on May

31, 2010, NATO jets bombed the region in support of the ground efforts of the Afghan National Army (ANA). The Afghan defence ministry released a statement saying that an ANA commando unit and coalition forces recaptured the Taliban district, with ISAF claiming no shots had been fired and no one had been injured. The *Bargi Matai* area had become a base for militant insurgency over the last few weeks, as the Taliban launch an offensive against foreign troops and the US-backed Karzai government.

**Reading:** [Afghan, NATO forces recapture area from Taliban](#) , [NATO says Afghan District Centre Recaptured in Airborne Assault](#) , [NATO strikes Afghan insurgent positions](#) , [US and Afghan troops move to remote area in Afghanistan](#) , [Afghan, foreign forces recapture district from Taliban](#)

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