

September 9, 2010
Issue #35

In Focus Transatlantic News Digest

Electronic Newsletter of the Atlantic Council of Canada

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Planned Koran Burning Sparks International Outrage **By: Monika Wyrzykowska**

On the ninth year anniversary of the biggest ever terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, a small church in Gainesville, Florida is planning on commemorating the events with a public book burning of the Koran. Terry Jones, Reverend of the 50-member Dove World Outreach Centre, has said that this is meant to represent a way to stand up for terrorism. HE told a news conference Wednesday that he has been receiving a lot of encouragement, with supporters mailing in copies of the Islamic holy text. His plans have quickly drawn attention and condemnation from top levels of government all over the world. "I unequivocally condemn it", said Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Thursday morning. In a rare invocation of his faith, he added: "My God and my Christ is a tolerant God, and that's what we want to see in this world."

Rev. Jones has been under intense pressure from the White House and other religious leaders to call off his plans, so far to no avail. Top US commander in Afghanistan, General Petraeus, has warned that "images of the burning of a Koran would undoubtedly be used by extremists in Afghanistan – and around the world – to inflame public opinion and incite violence." U.S. President Obama has called the planned event "a recruitment bonanza for al-Qaeda." NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen also added his voice to the outcry of opposition: "Such acts are in contradiction with the values and principles... we base our tolerant democracies, in contradiction for the values which we fight in Afghanistan and elsewhere."

US officials say they cannot intervene as the church's actions would likely be protected by the US constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech.

Sources: [Stephen Harper condemns Koran burning: 'My Christ is a tolerant God'](#), [US President Obama condemns plans to burn the Koran](#), [NATO & Petraeus condemn Koran burning plan](#)

Taliban outnumbered around Kandahar City **By: Tanah Sullivan**

On Tuesday, September 7, 2010, British Major General Nick Carter, NATO's top commander for southern Afghanistan, announced that coalition troops will clear the area around Kandahar City by December, 2010. Carter has announced that the 15,000 to 17,000 Afghan security forces and 15,000 international troops have vastly outnumbered the estimated 1000 Taliban insurgents operating in and around Kandahar City.

Carter has said that the planned offensive will take place in the "next two to three months", and NATO and Afghan forces "will have rid those areas very much of the Taliban" within the scheduled timeline of mid- to the end of November.

The 28,000-strong NATO force in the region fighting with the Afghan forces to provide air and logistical support includes Americans, British, Canadians, French and Belgian troops. The US-led troop surge this past summer to increase security in Kandahar City has been one of the biggest NATO has launched throughout the 9-year war. Carter has said that most of the coalition efforts are focused on

eradicating the Taliban stronghold in the districts of Zhari and Panjwai in Kandahar province.

Sources: [NATO: Taliban outnumbered around key Afghan town](#), [NATO aims to oust Taliban from Kandahar by November](#), [Kandahar to be secure in two months: NATO](#), [NATO-Led and Afghan Forces Have the Initiative in Kandahar, Says Southern Afghanistan Commander](#)

NATO Headquarters to house Serbian Mission

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

Serbia has announced its intention to open a mission at the organization's headquarters in the Belgian capital Brussels, following an improvement in relations. After NATO carried out air raids on Serbia in 1999 to end the war in Kosovo, relations between Brussels and Belgrade have been bumpy.

Serbia was invited to join the "Partnership for Peace" program in 2006 after nationalist leader Slobodan Milosevic left power. Relations however soured once again in 2008 after leading Western powers (and NATO members) agreed to recognize Kosovo's independence from Serbia. NATO's military interventions in Serbia and the Kosovo issue led many to regard NATO an adversary of Serbian national interests. NATO still maintains a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, though its size has been reduced from 50,000 in 1999 to the present 10,000.

After a number of postponements, an ambassador and six military officers will finally set up their own office in the NATO headquarters in Brussels, having been eligible to do so since 2006. The event will take place at the end of next month during a visit to Brussels by Serbian defence minister Dragan Sutanovac, the country's only top-rank politician daring to speak positively about NATO.

Serbia's traditional alliance with Russia has not resulted in any sort of clear military alliance, and Serbian politicians who are openly or secretly against Euro-Atlantic integration, have started promoting in parliament a policy of "military neutrality". In its history, Serbia has been neutral only once, in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and will probably be completely surrounded by NATO members in future as Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia are on their way to joining it. Serbia's other neighbours – Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, are all already members.

Sources: [NATO Headquarters to House Serbian Mission from September](#), [Serbia to open mission at NATO headquarters in September](#), [Serbia to open NATO mission](#)

Afghan President Karzai establishes 'peace council' with Taliban as violence escalates

By: Tanah Sullivan

On Sunday, September 5, 2010, NATO announced the death of two foreign soldiers. One American soldier was killed on Saturday, September 4, 2010, after a Taliban-style bomb attack. NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) released a statement saying that the other soldier, whose nationality has not been released, died on Sunday in an insurgent attack. These deaths bring the total number of foreign troops to die in Afghanistan so far this year up to 497.

The war is almost at the end of its ninth year, as the number of international troops hits an all time high at 150 000. The deployments include 30 000 US troops, ordered by US President Barack Obama in December, 2009, as a part of Washington's new counter-insurgency strategy aimed at

bringing about an end to the war. Most of the new troops are deployed into Kandahar and Helmand provinces, where the Taliban insurgency is mostly concentrated.

On Sunday, September 5, 2010, Kandahar city was struck by an insurgent attack apparently targeting police vehicles, according to Kandahar provincial police chief General Sardar Mohammad Zazai. The attack injured four policemen, and was followed by another attack in the Dand district of Kandahar where another local police officer was killed while visiting his family. On Saturday night, 45 civilians were injured after a bomb exploded in a local market in central Ghazni province.

The violence that broke out across the country on Saturday and Sunday has caused widespread concerns that the overall situation for locals is only getting worse. However, on Saturday, September 4, 2010, President Hamid Karzai announced the establishment of the High Peace Council to initiate dialogue with the Taliban leadership as a means of ending the long war. This will be considered one of the most significant steps taken by Karzai towards an open dialogue with Taliban leadership. The members of the council include "jihadi leaders, influential figures and women", according to a statement released by Karzai's office. There are growing concerns however that the move has come too late, as the insurgency continues to escalate despite the US-troop surge this summer, with the death toll of foreign troop casualties this year almost surpassing the 2009 toll of 521.

Sources: [Karzai announces council to talk peace with Taliban](#), [Hamid Karzai sets up 'peace council' to pursue talks with the Taliban](#), [NATO reports two soldiers killed in Afghanistan](#), [Afghanistan sets up High Peace Council for talks with opposition](#), [Karzai sets up council for peace talks with Taliban](#)

Czech White Paper Looks towards NATO New Strategic Concept

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

A team of 15 security and international relations experts, led by former Czech defence minister and NATO secretary-general assistant Jiri Sedivy, is in the process of drafting a new vision for the future of the Czech Republic's armed forces. Jiří Štábl, a spokesman for the Czech Defence Ministry, has confirmed that the draft will largely be dictated by the new NATO strategy coming out in November. Štábl added that "the ambition is that three quarters of the armed forces of the Czech Republic are consistent with NATO standards." The White Paper has been criticized for being too pro-NATO and in turn giving EU initiatives a backseat role. Indeed, Štábl said although the government believes EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) initiatives are an important part of international security, NATO initiatives will take precedent and CSDP operations will be undertaken depending on what funding remains.

Nik Hynek, a researcher for the Prague Institute of International Relations, said a new military policy should realize the importance of balancing both European and trans-Atlantic interests. "They're complementary when speaking about a regional security community. There are certain things NATO is not interested in and vice versa, and this is one of the significant things that is going to shape the future of the Czech Republic in the international system and the region."

The drafting of the new vision comes at a time when military budgets are at a historic low. In the Czech Republic, the armed forces' budget was cut by 12.5 billion crowns in the past two years alone and military spending is now at 1.32% of DGP as compared to the 2.25% when the country joined NATO back in 1999. In order to fit within that budget, the ministry is considering lowering pay for armed forces employees. Sven Biscop, director of the Security and Global Governance Program at the Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, said Czech budget problems are exemplary of the situation across Europe, and a strategy that neglects to coordinate with other European countries would be costly in the long run.

"It's not a question of more money; it's accepting the fact that we will have to reorganize ourselves in a more multinational way," Biscop said. "Fragmentation is a problem; European countries are spending a lot of money on defence, and the Czechs would do good to look at the Lisbon Treaty, where there is a pooling of efforts which could be very useful in this regard."

Sources: [Czech military strategy looks toward U.S.](#), [Former minister heads team to draft military's vision](#)



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