



## THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL OF CANADA



### IN FOCUS TRANSATLANTIC NEWS DIGEST

May 25, 2011, Issue #50

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

- NATO Secretary-General Tours US
- Easing the Flow of Humanitarian Aid in Libya
- (Re)emergence of the Visegrad Group
- Mullah Mohammad Omar-Wanted: Alive or Else

#### EDITOR:

Jonathan Preece

[Jonathan.Preece@atlantic-council.ca](mailto:Jonathan.Preece@atlantic-council.ca)

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PATRON SPONSORS



#### NATO Secretary-General Tours US

By: Ryerson Neal

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen concluded a 5-day tour of the United States which included stops in Washington, Atlanta, Austin, and Chicago. The tour, titled "Allies in America", aimed to enliven the trans-Atlantic relationship and remind Americans of NATO's continued post-Cold War relevance. In an op-ed for the Huffington Post, Rasmussen stated that his mission was to dispel two lingering "misperceptions" about the NATO alliance in the United States: first, that NATO is a vehicle for European free-riding on security, and second, that the alliance is a "dusty artefact of the Cold War."

A former Danish prime minister with American grandchildren, Rasmussen was well-positioned to drive home the importance of continued transatlantic unity at the political, cultural, and personal levels. The theme of shared democratic values was pointedly embodied in his first stop at a Victory in Europe Day ceremony in Washington, where he called on attendees to always remember WWII's enduring historical lesson: that "... the security of America and Europe is indivisible." At his next major address, in Austin, Texas, he assured Americans that they were not alone in Afghanistan, reminding them that over 40,000 European and Canadian troops were fighting alongside US forces there. "America's NATO allies "understood the fundamental need to share the burden with the United States" he told his audience. The Secretary-General's visit comes as the American public increasingly sees little reason to continue the Afghan mission, especially in light of Osama bin Laden's recent death. While Rasmussen noted that bin Laden's demise was a positive development for all NATO members, he cautioned that international terrorism remained a threat and that it was still important to stay the course in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General also expounded and defended NATO's objectives in Libya.

The central objective of Rasmussen's tour was to let Americans know that their European and Canadian allies understand that NATO solidarity is a "two-way street," requiring continued commitment from all members. This reassurance comes as European defence budgets are in decline. Rasmussen has been a regular critic of such reductions; last summer he caused a stir in his home Denmark by vocally criticising the government's decision to axe funding for NATO projects. During his stop in Washington he warned, "One of my concerns is that European allies risk falling behind the pace of technological change because of their low level of defence spending." Rasmussen admitted that NATO's Libyan operations had revealed a technological gap between the US and other alliance members. "If Europeans are required to do more," he said, "then they will require help from the US, in particular in improving access to technology and research and development." One possible solution, he noted, was to pursue "smart defence" that would see the technological gap bridged through greater multilateral sharing of defence capability development.

Another prominent theme of Rasmussen's visit was NATO relations with Russia, to which he dedicated a major part of his Chicago address. The Secretary-General admitted that false expectations at the end of the Cold War had brought tension to the relationship, but he believed that the time was right for greater cooperation. In particular, he reiterated a NATO invitation for missile defence cooperation. In the days following Rasmussen's visit, Russia's President Medvedev appeared to signal interest in such collaboration.

The effect of Rasmussen's tour on NATO's public image in the US has yet to be seen. According to an *Atlantic Trends* survey conducted last June, roughly 60% of the American public agreed that NATO remained essential to US security. The survey also found that 76% of America's foreign policy "leaders" agreed with that assessment. However, growing concern about NATO missions in Libya and Afghanistan and the perceived imbalance between European and US burden-sharing might be changing this perception. US-NATO relations also suffered in February when Wikileaks released documents suggesting that US officials had been monitoring Rasmussen through secret sources. The Secretary-General wrapped up the trip on Saturday with a visit to the White House.

Further Reading: [Allies in America Tour Homepage](#), [Secretary-General's Op-Ed in Huffington Post](#), [Secretary-General's Address in Austin, Texas](#), [Secretary-General's Chicago Speech](#), [Interview with CNN](#), [NATO Chief: defence cuts head military in 'wrong direction'](#), [NATO chief says Libya operation exposing technological gap within alliance](#), [Wikileaks Shows US spying on NATO Secretary-General](#)

---

## Easing the Flow of Humanitarian Aid in Libya

Graham MacVannel

As NATO forces continue to enforce Security Council Resolution 1973 throughout Libyan air space and coastal regions, United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Libya Panos Moutzis is continuing discussions with Gaddafi forces over a potential pause to the military conflict.

The proposed 24-72 hour ceasefire would be used to deliver humanitarian aid to regions of western Libya where fighting has delayed the distribution of food, fuel, and medical supplies. The pause would also provide an opportunity for wounded and threatened residents to flee dangerous conflict zones. Over 400,000 people are thought to have left Libya since the commencement of military operations with another 600,000 estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance.

### Humanitarian aid shipments at risk.

In Misrata, NATO forces have seen a growing effort on the part of Colonel Gaddafi's forces to hinder the transportation of humanitarian aid into the rebel held port city. Within the past two weeks, NATO has reported an increased use of rigid-hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) attempting to mine the harbour and attack incoming ships. This has resulted in the repeated closing of the port due to concerns of anti-ship mines as well a spate of attacks on NATO patrol vessels most notably the recent attack on the HMCS Charlestown.

As forces loyal to Colonel Gaddafi attempt to discourage the movement of humanitarian aid into Misrata, the aggressive use of RHIBs is not the only threat to shipping vessels in the area. NATO forces recently witnessed new enemy tactics including unmanned boats filled with explosives and plastic mannequins designed to lure incoming ships. On shore, pro-Gaddafi shelling of the port continues to be a serious threat since most of the artillery is dispersed through residential areas of the city. As Andrew Mitchell, International Development Secretary of the United Kingdom, pointed out in a recent interview: "It is extremely difficult to defend the people who are there in the port. That is purely because the artillery that is being used against them is dug in in Misrata in civilian accommodation and - because of the great care that NATO is taking not to kill civilians - it is simply impossible for them to target these guns." Despite these attacks, the movement of aid has persisted in the surrounded city with over 4,000 tonnes of food, water, medical supplies, and sanitation material having entered the city via shipping.

### EUFOR Libya force put in to question

Valery Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator has stated that civilians were still being attacked in conflict areas all over Libya and has emphasized the importance of protecting civilian lives and respecting humanitarian law. When asked about the use of military assets in achieving these goals, Ms. Amos did not rule out the use of force but stated that "we have not yet reached this point". The prospective intervention of military force beyond that of naval and air support for humanitarian reasons can be traced back to the European Council's decision in early April to dedicate two battle groups to provide security for humanitarian agencies in Libya as well as secure the evacuation of refugees.

Since this decision, however, criticism has mounted in Finland and the Netherlands in reaction to the potential costs and implications of sending ground troops to Libya. Germany, originally opposed to the NATO mission, has suggested that it will take part in the operations pending an official request from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHR).

Since the EUFOR Libya battlegroups are the first of their kind to be proposed by the European Council, its failure to take action on the ground might have consequences on future missions. Questions have also been raised over the relevance of the battlegroups since humanitarian aid has been reaching civilians in conflict zones such as Misrata in spite of attacks by pro-Gaddafi forces. With no interest on the part of NATO to have boots on the ground in Libya, the future of EUFOR Libya is in doubt. As one senior national diplomat said “the operation ... is unlikely ever to be launched”.

Further Reading: [Mines Discovered in the Approaches to Misrata](#), [UN Seeks Deal to Allow Food and Medicine into Libya](#), [EU Battlegroups wait for Libya Operation “Unlikely ever to be Launched, Council Decides on EU Military Operation in Support of Humanitarian Assistance Operations in Libya](#), [Misrata: On Board the Under-fire Aid Ship](#), [Libya: Revised Appeal seeks \\$408 Million to Respond to Crisis](#)

---

## (Re)emergence of the Visegrad Group

Tom Aagaard

On May 12, a relatively obscure regional organization made an announcement that suggests serious discontent among NATO’s newer members. Meeting in Levoca, Slovakia, the ‘Visegrad Group’ – which consists of Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland – revealed that the four states would be forming an independent “battle group” outside of NATO command. Led by Poland, this Visegrad Group force will be fully operational by 2016. While hardly an earth-shattering development in the international balance-of-power, the fact that these four states would go out of their way to create such a military formation after years spent campaigning for NATO accession raises serious questions for the Alliance.

The grouping emerged out of a summit meeting held in 1991 to discuss ways to promote the integration of these new democracies into the Euro-Atlantic community. With an eye on medieval history, the meetings on May 12 were convened in the Hungarian castle town of Visegrad where Bohemian, Polish, and Hungarian monarchs had met in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century to establish peace and open up trade with Western Europe. The Visegrad Group (frequently shortened to V4) is primarily devoted to securing membership for its constituent states in what it considered to be the preeminent European organizations; NATO and the European Union. This goal has been realized as all four countries have secured membership in both NATO as well as the EU. Since 2004, the V4 has refocused its mandate towards issues such as energy security and explored ways to leverage its existing resources to further its members’ common interests in NATO and the EU.

Commentators have pointed to the Nordic experience with military cooperation as a model the V4 is attempting to emulate. Since 1994, NATO members Norway and Denmark have partnered with neutral Sweden and Finland through the Nordic Armaments Co-operation Program to identify common procurement needs. Pooling orders for foreign purchases has resulted in lower unit costs, increased interoperability, and opportunities for knowledge sharing. Additionally, trade in defence technology has been boosted significantly amongst partner states. The net result has been greater capability at lower cost, a crucial concern in the current economic climate. Speaking on the potential benefits of the V4, Slovak Defence Minister Ľubomír Galko states “we have agreed that we’ll get down to building the battle group. It represents a way of modernizing the individual armies as well as sharing our experience...we’ll also share the costs.”

From its inception, the V4 has been concerned about protecting the group’s newfound independence and freedom, its formation was explicitly motivated by “a desire to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe.” These states have a long history of foreign invasion and interference with each one having been invaded at least once in the past six decades. Given this experience, it is easy to see why such an emphasis was placed on gaining NATO membership.

A number of events in the past decade have, however, shaken the V4’s confidence in NATO’s security guarantee. The first was an internal Alliance dispute during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Turkey, fearing an Iraqi missile attack in the event of an American invasion, invoked Article IV, which states, “parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties is threatened.” Despite Iraq’s history of using “Scud” missiles against American allies during the first Gulf War, Germany, France, and Belgium blocked Turkey’s request for NATO involvement arguing that approval would serve as an implicit sanction of war.

As Russia emerged from the 1990s as an aggressive political, military, and energy player, the V4 countries grew increasingly concerned. To their disappointment, the rest of the Alliance did not share their anxiety. This divide was widened following the South Ossetia War in August 2008 as many in Central and Eastern Europe felt that NATO should have adopted a more robust response. The V4 had high hopes for the New Strategic Concept but were frustrated that only a single citizen – former Polish Foreign Minister Prof. Adam Rotfeld – was selected from the V4 to participate in its formulation.

A policy paper published by the Visegrad Security Cooperation Initiative stressed that “confirming the commitments anchored in Art. V of the Washington Treaty must be the core element of the Strategic Concept and should be complemented by concrete implementation initiatives, such as contingency planning for those states who wish it.” The paper also stated, “this commitment must not remain a ‘paper tiger’ only but has to be supported... by concrete defence plans.” This quote illuminates the extent to which the V4 political community has become disillusioned with NATO.

None of this is to say that the V4 countries have decided to go it alone. Combined, the V4 countries possess a miniscule fraction of NATO’s military resources. Instead, the formation of an independent battle group represents a “Plan B” to any future aggression from Russia. This coming July, Poland will assume the presidency of the EU for a six-month period and has signaled its intention to focus on defense issues. In particular it hopes to reinvigorate the organization’s Common Security and Defense Policy. Through this position, Poland hopes that it will be able to strengthen Western Europe’s commitment to defending the EU’s Eastern flank.

The V4’s track record on joint military efforts such as its group helicopter modernization project has been spotty at best. However, the recent announcement from Levoča suggests that Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, may be putting a renewed emphasis on this regional organization. At very least the level of commitment that these states display towards the V4 could serve as a barometer for Eastern Europe’s confidence in NATO.

---

## Mullah Mohammad Omar- Wanted: Alive or Else

By: Kavita Bapat

Taliban leader Mullah Mohamad Omar was a recluse even before the fall of the Taliban government in late 2001. It is therefore no surprise that along with his comrades, he has eluded capture by western coalition forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan for the past 10 years. Richard Holbrooke, the late US envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, voiced his belief that Mullah Omar is holed up in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Others have claimed that he is more likely operating from Quetta or Karachi in Pakistan, as this would allow him more maneuverability in training and leading the resurgent Taliban. Mullah Omar has also led much of the fight against foreign troops in Afghanistan, as evidenced by an e-mail message sent to journalists in 2009 in which he urged the Taliban to continue the fight against NATO forces in the region.

Now a prominent militant leader, Mullah Omar was once just a small-time commander in the Afghan forces resisting Soviet occupation. After leading a national uprising in 1994 against the former Mujahideen warlords in Kandahar, he garnered respect throughout the region, becoming widely known as the catalyst of the renewed Taliban. The completion of this renewal by guiding the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan motivated his compatriots to refer to him as the “commander of the faithful”, a title bearing great significance in Islamic history. Despite his notoriety however, Mullah Omar has remained elusive. He has never met or contacted any western journalist, leaving all communication with outside world to his foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil. To most Afghans, Mullah Mohammad Omar is nothing but a faceless name, though those who claim to have seen him say that “he is around 50 years old, with a black beard and a black turban.” Experts have confirmed that Mullah Omar’s right eye has been damaged by shrapnel as a result of combating Afghanistan’s Soviet occupants in the 1980s.

Even during his 5 years in charge of Afghanistan, Mullah Omar was virtually invisible, rarely visiting the capital or being seen by anyone except those in his inner circle. However, his extreme interpretation of Islam and harsh implementation of Sharia law during the Taliban’s rule was far from invisible. During this time, Afghan women were forced to cover themselves fully from head-to-toe, denied education and employment opportunities, and banned from leaving their homes. Additionally, women who were found to have committed adultery were often stoned to death and homosexuals were crushed under brick walls. Mullah Omar also instituted a death sentence for those who chose to convert to any religion other than Islam and gave the now infamous orders to demolish Afghanistan’s ancient Buddha statues at Bamiyan.

It was only after the events of 9/11 that Mullah Omar appeared on the western world’s radar, ranking high on America’s most wanted list, with a \$10 million bounty on his head. Much of the US-led campaign to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan was motivated by Mullah Omar’s denial to hand over his close friend and ally Osama bin Laden. In statements released to the public following 9/11, Mullah Omar strongly defended bin Laden against accusations that he organized the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Instead, Mullah Omar accused the US of attempting to cover up the failures of its faulty

intelligence agency. However, bin Laden was believed to have heavily financed the Taliban government in Afghanistan. It is also rumoured that ties between Mullah Omar and bin Laden may have gone further, as there has been some suggestion that bin Laden may have taken one of Mullah Omar's daughter's as a fourth wife. Mullah Omar and his close friend allegedly spoke with each other daily by way of satellite phone and met for regular fishing trips.

Mullah Omar disappeared shortly after NATO forces first arrived in Afghanistan, but despite his elusiveness, he remains the spiritual leader of the Taliban and insurgents claim that he still has considerable control of Taliban strategic planning. Despite recent statements from the US government about positive negotiations with the Taliban, Mullah Omar has been uncompromising in his views, denouncing the Karzai government as a western puppet and demanding a complete withdrawal of NATO forces from the region. In the days after Osama bin Laden's death, it was speculated that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had been killed in Pakistan as well. However, the Taliban quickly dismissed these reports. Although Mullah Omar has not been seen or heard from for many days, it is believed that he is alive and that Taliban leadership has relocated to cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad to avoid American drone attacks.

With the US meeting with the Taliban on at least three separate occasions in recent months and Pakistan's ISI encouraging talks with insurgent groups, both the CIA and the ISI are keen to keep Mullah Omar alive and engage in negotiations. It has become apparent that Mullah Omar's consent is needed in order for any future peace process and reintegration of former combatants to take place. In Afghanistan and the surrounding region, the mere rumor that Mullah Omar had perished at the hands of Pakistani forces created mass panic and uncertainty. Mullah Omar is a uniting force in the Taliban and his death would only serve to further fragment the insurgency and make negotiations more difficult. Germany is hoping to ensure Taliban attendance at the Bonn Conference this coming December. Following the death of Osama bin Laden, the international community has high hopes that Mullah Omar will divorce himself from al-Qaeda's global jihad ideology and adopt a more moderate posture. Consistent with his elusive tendencies, Mullah Omar's next move will be difficult to forecast.

Further Reading: [Why the US Needs Mullah Omar Alive](#), [Profile: Mullah Mohammed Omar](#), [Mullah Mohammad Omar: Profile of the One-Eyed Taliban Leader](#), [Biography: Mullah Muhammad Omar](#), [Taliban: Reports of leader Mullah Omar's death in Pakistan are greatly exaggerated](#), [More commando raids, please: We got Bin Laden, now let's get the Taliban's Mullah Omar, too](#), [Osama Bin Laden's death: Alliance between Al Qaeda, Taliban may end](#), [Mullah Omar has 'disappeared': Afghanistan](#), [Afghan Taliban deny claims their leader Mullah Omar was killed in Pakistan](#), [Afghanistan says Mullah Omar has 'disappeared'](#)

---

+

*Disclaimer: Any views or opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the authors and the news agencies and do not necessarily represent those of the Atlantic Council of Canada. This newsletter is published for information purposes only.*

+

*The Atlantic Council of Canada is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the idea that the transatlantic relationship between Canada and the United States, and the nations of Europe, is of critical importance to Canadians in cultural, security and economic terms. The Council's mandate is to promote a broader and deeper understanding of international peace and security issues relating to NATO.*

+

The Atlantic Council of Canada + 165 University Ave., Suite 701, Toronto, ON M5H 3B8  
Ph.: 416-979-1875 + F.: 416-979-0825 + Email: [info@atlantic-council.ca](mailto:info@atlantic-council.ca)

