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## In Focus Transatlantic News Digest

### Electronic Newsletter of the Atlantic Council of Canada

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#### **Afghan President Karzai turns to Russia for support** **By: Tanah Sullivan**

On Wednesday, August 18, 2010, Afghan President Hamid Karzai turned to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for help in fighting insurgents.

Two decades after Russia ended a “disastrous” conflict in Afghanistan that killed approximately 15 000 Soviet troops, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has announced that Moscow is currently in talks with NATO and Afghanistan on a plan to send helicopters and reinforcements to help combat the growing insurgency. However, no firm deals have emerged from the summit that brought Karzai and Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari to Russia.

Karzai and Medvedev met at the Russian President’s summer residence near the Black Sea, where Karzai reached out to his Russian counterpart for “support of friends and from great countries like Russia”.

Analysts have said that the meeting was aimed at boosting the Kremlin’s clout in Afghanistan amid Washington’s plans to withdraw the summer of 2011. Medvedev also met with Pakistani President Zardari and Tajik President Imomali Rakhmon separately, before a meeting of all four leaders, where Zardari urged them to “make the region come together and fight against this war of ideology”.

Medvedev has told President Karzai that Russia will support the Afghan Government’s fight against terrorism, and “is ready to help in any way”, yet has not committed to sending any troops. Moscow has announced however that the leaders did discuss a plan for Russia to supply helicopters in the battle against the Taliban insurgency.

Several months ago, Russia submitted a proposal on the delivery of about 20 helicopters to NATO, with a decision to be made within the next six weeks.

One reason for Russia’s willingness to support is the issue of drug trafficking, with drugs originating in Afghanistan exacerbating a pre-existing major drug abuse problem in Russia. Medvedev told reporters that the drug abuse problem “is an issue for all countries in the region”, and that their actions should be synchronized accordingly.

The current US and NATO strategy fighting Afghan drug production has been criticized heavily by Moscow. Russia has continuously called for the eradication of Afghan opium poppy fields, which NATO has responded to by suggesting that Moscow could contribute more of its assistance against the insurgency as a means of controlling the drug trafficking in the region.

Minister Lavrov has also said that the leaders discussed routing electricity supplies from Tajikistan into Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**Further reading:** [Russia President meets with Karzai](#), [Afghanistan makes deal with Russia](#), [Pakistan, Karzai seeks assistance for Afghanistan at Russian summit](#), [4 presidents, 1 resort, multiple issues](#)

## **Last US combat brigade leaves Iraq**

**By: Tanah Sullivan**

Thursday, August 19, 2010 saw the final brigade of US combat troops leaving Iraq. It has been seven and a half years since the first late-night air strike that crushed the Iraqi Government and was watched on television screens all across the globe. Soldiers have been heading south to Kuwait to leave the country on paved, black top roads—a marked difference from the dusty roads they once drove in on years ago. Since the beginning of the war, 4415 Americans have died, and close to 32 000 more have been wounded.

**Further reading:** ['Last' brigade of US combat troops leave Iraq](#), [Iraq War: Major Milestone. But It's Not Over](#), [US withdrawal from Iraq is bittersweet moment](#), [US troop strength in Iraq put at 52 000](#)

## **Closure of private security firms in Afghanistan**

**By: Clara Wong**

President Hamid Karzai's spokesperson announced on Monday August 16, that private security firms and armed contracting companies will be given four months to dissolve. This has alarmed the Western community which has relied heavily on such protection and raised concerns about a possible security-crisis. President Karzai has stated that private security firms have been undermining government forces by creating a parallel system which divert resources required to train the army and police. Afghan authorities began registering, regulating and licensing the firms in 2006 but some firms have been plagued with questionable activity ranging from extortion and kidnapping to the smuggling of drugs.

A government spokesman says a presidential decree is expected soon, which will outline the shutdown process. Contractors in Afghanistan perform a variety of jobs from guarding supply convoys to military bases to handling personal security details. Over 50 companies employ 30,000-40,000 armed personnel across Afghanistan. The closure of such security firms would also cut a major source of employment as more than 90 percent of security contractors in Afghanistan are Afghans.

The spokesperson is adamant that the January 2011 deadline will be observed and described it as "a serious programme that the government of Afghanistan will execute." ISAF has stated that dissolving private security firms would not be practical or possible until an alternative force, the Afghan national security force, could provide the necessary conditions of security. A gradual withdrawal of these firms would be more favourable for the stability of Afghanistan.

**Further reading:** [Afghan president orders private security closures](#), [Karzai calls for disbanding of private security firms within four months](#), [Afghanistan seeks closure of private security firms](#)

## **Canadians honoured for foiling attack on NATO base**

**By: Clara Wong**

Three Canadian soldiers received military commendations on Friday August 13<sup>th</sup> for exemplary bravery. They were recognized for their instrumental roles in foiling an attack on Kandahar Airfield. Exact details and participant accounts of the incident on August 3<sup>rd</sup> have only just emerged.

Sgt. Marc-André Rousseau and Cpl. Joseph Henry, both based at Val Cartier, Que., and Sapper Kirk Farrell, based at Petawawa, Ont., were consulting with a private contractor on a new, classified piece of equipment that had just been installed inside a Canadian light-armoured vehicle. A group of armed insurgents launched a ground attack, trying to force their way inside the base on KAF's northern perimeter when the three Canadian soldiers were working inside the contractor's shop.

That is when a vehicle-borne IED explosion occurred, explained Rousseau, who didn't see it but just heard it. He then heard a RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire. As the three Canadian soldiers ran outside to a bunker to take cover, a firefight broke out involving a platoon of U.S. soldiers who were conducting a training exercise.

As the three Canadian soldiers ran to the light-armed vehicle (LAV), Rousseau saw insurgents who were carrying AK-47s and RPGs moving to a hole in the fence caused by the suicide IED blast, and an insurgent who was already inside the wire. Sapper Farrell got into the driver's seat, Cpl Henry took his position and Sgt. Rousseau climbed into the vehicle's turret and spun it towards the insurgents.

The insurgent inside the wire ran forward and was 40 metres from the LAV just as Sgt. Rousseau aimed the cannon at him. Seeing that he had nowhere to run, the insurgent blew himself up. Not waiting for the dust to settle, Sgt. Rousseau swept his cannon from side to side at the obscured insurgents in the dust and let loose a volley of 10 rounds of 25 mm incendiary ammunition, which explodes on contact. All the insurgents, somewhere between eight and ten, died instantly.

A small ceremony was held for them on Friday outside Task Force Kandahar headquarters. British Royal Air Commodore Gordon Moulds, KAF commander, presented each soldier with a plaque honouring their efforts and commended them for "courage, excellence and steadfastness in the face of danger expected of the Canadian military."

**Further reading:** [Canadians honoured for bravery](#), [Canadians honoured for defending NATO base](#), [Soldiers recall how they foiled attack on NATO base](#), [Canadians honoured for role in repelling Afghan base attack](#)

## **Local Afghan protest against NATO raid**

**By Tanah Sullivan**

On Thursday, August 12, a group of approximately 300 Afghan villagers took part in a protest over the deaths of three brothers allegedly killed in a NATO-led raid. The raid took place on Wednesday, August 11, in the eastern province of Wardak.

The villagers have said those that were killed last night in the Sayed Abad district were innocent, an allegation which NATO has denied. According to NATO reports, those killed in the raid were several suspected insurgents. A local Taliban commander was also detained during the raid.

A relative of the dead brothers, Mahmoud Khan, has told the Associated Press that US troops entered the family's home in Zarin Khil village through a window late Wednesday evening, shooting the brothers and taking the father into custody. However, NATO spokesman Ryan Donald has contradicted the reports, saying the men were all "suspected insurgents" who had "pointed weapons at troops".

NATO has released a statement in regards to the night's events, saying that the "assault force engaged the threat, killing the men".

The differing accounts of the raid have reflected how sensitive the NATO operation and its mission in Afghanistan have become. In many areas where the Taliban operate, it has become extremely difficult to distinguish villagers from insurgents, and, according to correspondents, it is with growing swiftness that public opinion can turn against NATO's forces "even when they are certain they have targeted the correct people".

In a separate case, the International Assistance Mission (IAM) has blamed militants for the deaths of 10 of the charity's workers last week, including eight foreigners. The head of the IAM, Dirk Frans, said that militants were "probably responsible" for shooting 10 of the medical charity's staff dead in Badakhshan province, and not thieves as was previously suggested by local police.

Authorities believe that the attack was led by a group of non-local militants, as the only survivor, the Afghan driver of the convoy, has told investigators that the gunmen were using words more commonly used in Pakistan.

The UN has reported that 386 civilians were killed by NATO or Afghan forces in the first six months of this year, while the Taliban were responsible for 76% of civilian deaths and injuries during that same period.

[Afghan villagers protest night raid](#), [Afghan protesters allege civilian deaths in NATO raid](#), [Afghan protests against civilian deaths NATO investigating Afghan civilian deaths](#), [Afghan villages protest over NATO civilian killings](#) [Claims of Afghan civilian deaths spark protest](#)



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