

*Small Wars Journal received the following personal statement from a friend of ours via email highlighting the thoughts of Lieutenant Colonel Shawn Stroud. LTC Shroud is the Communications Director of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan.*

What follows is my personal statement concerning the allegations made in the recent Rolling Stone article. Please feel free to share with your colleagues.

As a public affairs specialist in the United States Army, I recognize that a free and impartial press is fundamental to the proper functioning of our government and an integral part of our way of life. Recognizing this, the founding fathers enshrined it in the Bill of Rights. The system of checks and balances underlying our democratic system is predicated upon the free flow of information and ideas, particularly between civilian leadership and the military.

The foundation of a free and impartial press is built on three reporting principles: accuracy, balance and characterization. The recent Rolling Stone article about the NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan fails all three of these principles. I categorically deny the assertion that NTM-A used an Information Operations cell to influence distinguished visitors. The evidence provided in the Rolling Stone article is misleading at best and outright false in many places. The article is based on a single source of information, bereft of balance by any additional sources. Specifically, the characterization of CODEL preparation is wholly inaccurate. Personnel with backgrounds in IO were utilized only because of their availability. They were never directed to use their specific IO skills while preparing background information for the command in advance of distinguished guest visits. Moreover, in the specific case of Lt. Col. Holmes, a staff judge advocate determined his use as a staff officer in this manner was completely legal.

ISAF headquarters has initiated an investigation into these matters. For its part, NTM-A welcomes the opportunity to rectify any inaccuracies and mischaracterizations surrounding the Rolling Stones story. In the meantime, the command continues to move forward with building the Afghan National Security Force. I have no doubt the assertions made in the article will be proven baseless and the reporter will be held accountable.

Shawn