
Canada's Former JTF2 Commando leader was a Deputy Commander in the Iraq War, throughout 2008



Brig. Gen. Nicolas E. Matern

By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade.

In January 2008, Brigadier-General Nicolas Matern—former commanding officer of Canada's Joint Task Force Two "counter-terrorism" commando unit—began a year-long tour with the U.S. Army in Iraq. Matern held a senior leadership position in the Iraq war. He was Deputy Commanding General, Coalition and Infrastructure for Multi-National Corps—Iraq (MNC-I).¹

While deployed in Iraq, Matern reported directly to Lieutenant-General Lloyd Austin III, the U.S. general who led the 170,000-strong MNC-I, "the tactical unit responsible for command and control of operations throughout Iraq."² In January 2010, the MNF-I changed its name to U.S. Forces—Iraq.

While stationed in Iraq throughout 2008, Matern's responsibilities included "helping U.S. forces there and preparing to co-ordinate coalition units."³

U.S. Colonel Bill Buckner, spokesman for the 18th Airborne Corps said part of Matern's "battlefield circulation will be going and visiting" soldiers from various countries based in Iraq "and making sure they're getting the things they need, the support they need and making sure they are integrated into our [U.S.] operations."⁴ The U.S. Colonel also revealed that Canada's General Matern "is fully

integrated into everything we do.... He attends all of our planning sessions, our plans and operations briefings, all of our commander's staff meetings."⁵

Colonel Buckner displayed great faith in Matern's ability to fulfil his important responsibilities in the Iraq war, saying that the Canadian Brigadier-General's

"special operations experience, in addition to his other service in the army, fits in well with the U.S. unit. 'He comes in with a unique set of skills.... We're the 18th Airborne Corps, we're the home of the airborne and the special operating forces, so he fits in very nicely to this warrior ethos we have here. He's going to do a great job.'⁶

This perception that Matern had the right stuff to fit in "very nicely" to the U.S. Airborne's "warrior ethos," stemmed from his experience with Canada's so-called "elite commandos." Prior to becoming a Brigadier-General, moving to the U.S. and joining the war in Iraq, Matern was Deputy Commander of the "Canadian Special Operations Forces Command" (CSOFCOM),⁷ in Ottawa. Before that he commanded Joint Task Force 2, which is CSOFCOM's best-known secret unit. And, in August 2006, Matern was the acting commander of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR), another unit within CSOFCOM. When CSOR first appeared, Matern was quoted as saying: "'JTF2 is a scalpel; what you have here is more of a hammer,' said Matern, speaking in Petawawa. 'Sometimes you need the hammer to clear the way for the scalpel.'⁸

Matern's training in counterinsurgency warfighting also included overseas missions. He was, for instance, "a seasoned special operations officer who served with Canadian Special Forces in Afghanistan."⁹

Upon returning to the U.S. from Iraq in January 2009, Matern resumed the posting he had begun in June 2007 as Deputy Commanding General of Operations for the 18th Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, in North Carolina.¹⁰ Matern described his role in the Iraq war as "mindboggling, interesting and rewarding." He also claimed to have "learned a lot from the experience about orchestration of staff and staff management."¹¹

By January 2010, during the extremely-militarized response to the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti, General Matern was acting as the "coordinator of humanitarian assistance with the U.S.-run Joint Task Force-Haiti."¹² Canadian antiwar researcher Anthony Fenton cites a corporate news article claiming that the "lessons learned" by Ft. Bragg airborne units—when "dealing with counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan"—were applied to "the job of distributing food and water and providing medical help"¹³ in Haiti. It seems more likely that the heavy-handed militarisation of aid—epitomized by using war-hardened counterinsurgency commandos as supposed agents of development aid—was deemed necessary because of fears that Haitians might rise up in a revolt against long-standing military occupation, injustice and exploitation.

After Matern "bid farewell" to his deputy command

responsibilities at Fort Bragg in July 2010, he took up a new post as Chief of Staff for Operations for Canadian Forces Expeditionary Command (CEFCOM),¹⁴ which is “responsible for planning and conducting all CF operations outside North America, except those conducted by Canadian Special Operations Forces Command.”¹⁵

While in the National Security Studies Programme at the Canadian Forces College in 2006. At that time, when Matern was a Colonel, he wrote a major paper called “Continental defence integration divide: can it be bridged?” In it, he “examines the main impediments” that “hamper any meaningful advancement in...continental defence integration.” He also “explores opportunities” and concludes that “moving to an enhanced state of continental defence integration would likely require more political impetus if not another tragic event the likes of 9/11.”¹⁶

Having served Canada as a top commander in the U.S.-led war in Iraq, Brigadier-General Matern may now be using his new position as CEFCOM’s Chief of Staff, to push towards the “continental-defence-integration” ideal that he explored as a Colonel.

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During an election debate on March 11, 2008, Liberal Foreign Affairs critic Bob Rae repeatedly and adamantly denied Chris Tindale’s assertion that Canada had senior military officers in Iraq.

Bob Rae Seriously Uninformed about Canadian Commanders serving in the Iraq War

By Chris Tindale, Green Party activist and candidate.

While answering a question at the debate, I mentioned that there are currently Canadian military officers serving in Iraq as part of the American command. Bob Rae interrupted me to object adamantly, almost angrily. “No there aren’t!”

Yes, I said, there are. “No there aren’t,” Mr. Rae said again: “They’re part of our military exchange program,” I explained. Strangely, Mr. Rae demanded that I tell him where in Iraq our officers were stationed, as if my inability to do so would prove they weren’t there. [Rae asked this six times in as many seconds.]

At that point, seeing no immediate resolution to our disagreement, I moved on with the rest of my answer. I’m quite taken aback that Mr. Rae could have been so misinformed about our military’s exchange program with the U.S. and our direct involvement in the war in Iraq. It’s made worse by the fact that Mr. Rae isn’t just any Liberal candidate: he’s the party’s foreign affairs critic.

On January 19, 2008, during this election campaign, Canwest News Service reported that Canadian Forces Brig.-Gen. Nicolas Matern had “recently arrived in Baghdad” to take “a leading roll [sic] in Iraq.”

Canadian officers have been serving in Iraq since at least 2003 as discussed in both the House of Commons and the mainstream media.

How is it possible that the Liberal foreign affairs critic was not only unaware of these basic facts, but was so sure of the opposite that he forcefully interrupted to contradict me, not once, but repeatedly? This raises serious questions regarding his knowledge of his own portfolio.

Source: “Rae Seriously Uninformed Regarding Iraq,” March 12, 2008. www.christindal.ca/tag/iraq/
See the video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhkVwOdjh3g