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Should flag be lowered every time?

Proposal would limit war dead honour

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OTTAWA—An expert panel has advised cabinet to oppose a move to lower the Canadian flag on the Peace Tower whenever a soldier dies in Afghanistan, saying it would debase the honour.

In a report to Secretary of State Jason Kenney, former chief herald Robert Watt urged the government to keep Remembrance Day as the lone anniversary to mark Canadian war dead by lowering the tower flag to half-mast.

The Commons is to vote tomorrow on a flag-lowering motion proposed by a Liberal MP.

Watt, with support from four other experts, recommended a new protocol that would limit half-masting the Peace Tower flag to mourning the deaths of current and former representatives of the Crown, the prime minister and the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

Under the recommendations, the flag would no longer be lowered on the deaths of senators and MPs, or former senators and MPs.

"In addition, we also strongly believe that there is only one commemorative day each year where the National Flag needs to be half-masted," Watt wrote to Kenney. "That is Remembrance Day. Our rationale in this case is that coinage of half-masting has been debased."

Debate has simmered over Liberal MP Andrew Telegdi's motion calling on the Commons to declare that the Peace Tower flag should be lowered to honour "Canadian Forces and other Canadian government personnel ... killed while serving in overseas peacekeeping, peacemaking or humanitarian missions."

The motion threatens to rekindle a furor that raged in May 2006.

BLAST KILLS 2 BRITISH SOLDIERS

KANDAHAR—A blast struck a NATO patrol in southern Afghanistan, killing two British soldiers, officials said yesterday.

The British troops were airlifted to a military hospital after they were caught in the explosion during a routine patrol Sunday, NATO said in a statement. Both died at the hospital.

Britain's defence ministry said the two were serving with 40 Commando Royal Marines on patrol near Kajaki in Helmand province when their vehicle was hit.

The deaths bring the number of British troops who have died in Afghanistan since 2001 to 91.

In neighbouring Kandahar, also a violent province, a roadside bomb hit a car carrying Afghan private security guards protecting a road construction crew in Zhari district yesterday, killing three guards, said district chief Niyaz Mohammad Sarhadi.

Canada's death toll since the Afghan

mission began in 2002 is 81 soldiers and one diplomat. Most of the Canadian dead were deployed in Kandahar province.

Associated Press