

Canadians scale back planned military demo in DC

"Simulated bomb blasts within blocks of the White House and the Capitol"

By [Eileen Sullivan](#)

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WASHINGTON: A planned Canadian military demonstration that would have included simulated bomb blasts within blocks of the White House and the Capitol, has been scaled back after media reports focused on the explosive elements.

The Canadian Embassy had planned to simulate the detonation of an improvised explosive device several times over two days starting Sept. 23 to demonstrate what life is like in war-torn Afghanistan and how Canadian forces there respond with medical help.

In a Sept. 7 story, Canada's military attache here, Lt. Col. Douglas Martin, told the Toronto Globe and Mail that the demonstration would take place in the front courtyard and driveway of the Canadian Embassy. "Absolutely, you are going to hear it out on Pennsylvania Avenue," Martin told the paper.

But The Associated Press learned Friday that the Canadians had scrapped the IED blast simulation.

Under the new scenario, it is likely that people on Pennsylvania Avenue will hear loud voices behind the 6-foot gate surrounding a fake Afghan village in the Canadian Embassy's driveway, Martin said. But there will be no sounds of fake gun shots or bomb explosions, he said.

"It will be a little bit quieter than perhaps what you heard on the Potomac today," said Martin, referring to the fears and concerns caused by erroneous news reports Friday morning that the Coast Guard fired 10 shots at a boat on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

As part of a security exercise, Coast Guard boats appeared to try to stop an intruder boat on the river near the Pentagon; radio transmissions over a Coast Guard training channel said shots had been fired and one officer was heard saying: "bang, bang, bang." The agency later said that was a standard method of simulating gunfire during training.

The news reports spurred the FBI to respond to the scene and flights to be temporarily grounded at Reagan.

The D.C. Fire Department said the Canadian Embassy obtained all the permits necessary to hold the demonstration. The Secret Service said it was aware of the Canadian plans.

"The IED portion — pun intended — has blown out of proportion," Martin told the AP. And on Thursday, the Canadian defense minister decided not to include the IED blast in its program

or do anything else to scare the general population, spokesman Dan Dugas said in Toronto.

“I don’t think it’s required to make loud noises on the Mall to show people what the Canadian Forces are doing in Afghanistan,” Dugas said. “We’re doing a fabulous job and at a cost. And I think it’s sufficient to remind Americans of our contribution to this international mission without having to set off pyrotechnics.”

The two-day demonstration will include what an Afghan village would look like after an IED blast, Martin said. Canadian troops will play the military parts, and people from Afghanistan who work in the U.S. will play the roles of Afghans.

During the demonstration, the Canadians will host panels inside the embassy addressing policing in Afghanistan and psychological injury to troops, Martin said.

Associated Press writer Robert Gillies contributed to this report from Toronto.

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