

In Focus Transatlantic News Digest

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Editors: Elaine Kanasewich, Darya Klepchikova

Email: elaine.kanasewich@atlantic-council.ca

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NATO-Russia Relations

After the infamous Georgia-Russia conflict last August and substantially deteriorated relations between Russia and the West thereafter, Russia may finally be ready to take the first steps to fix its relationship with NATO and the U.S. Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, emphasized the importance of getting their relationship back on track, at the same time maintaining that it will only be possible if both parties return to the founding principles of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC).

As a token of the Kremlin's readiness to cooperate with NATO, Lavrov cited Russia's support for NATO's mission in Afghanistan and their willingness to allow non-military supplies for International forces to be delivered through Russian territory in compliance with their agreement with NATO. Even greater cooperation, including transit of weapons, may be expected on Russia's part upon condition of fully normalizing Russia-NATO relations.

At the Munich Security Conference earlier this month, the issue of the measured re-engagement between Russia and NATO was also brought up, and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov assured the Secretary General of their willingness to collaborate with NATO-led International forces in Afghanistan on security issues. According to Russia's envoy to NATO, Dmitri Rogozin, there is a possibility that NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer will pay a visit to Moscow, during which it is expected that the lengthy process of restoring Russia-NATO cooperation will be commenced, and the issues touched upon during the Munich Security Conference will be further discussed.

Since military cooperation between NATO and Russia has not been resumed and an embargo has yet to be lifted from joint military initiatives, this subject will need to be addressed by military representatives from defence and military agencies at a high political level. But before this happens, a foundation for future progress at a diplomatic level can be laid at a full-fledged meeting of NRC, tentatively scheduled for March 2009.

Despite Russia's assertions of their desire to improve their relationship with NATO and the West, some are skeptical as to their true intentions. The Kremlin's decision of increased cooperation with NATO and support for the Afghan Mission followed the somewhat unexpected decision by the Kyrgyz government to close the U.S. airbase in Manas that was vital for delivering supplies to US troops struggling with the increased violence of the insurgencies. What is more, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's announcement of the airbase's closure coincided with Russia's promise of billions in aid and loans for Kyrgyzstan, which could not but arouse some speculations as to the connection between the two moves. Both Russian and Kyrgyz governments, however, denied these suppositions as groundless.

Live link to articles: [US-Russia: Missile Diplomacy](#), [Russia Ready to Fix Ties with NATO - Lavrov](#), [Russia May Expand Shipments of NATO Supplies to Afghanistan](#), [45th Munich Security Conference](#), [Russia's Envoy to NATO](#), [Russia may help US over Afghanistan](#), [Russia open to better relations with NATO](#), [Russia open to U.S. arms shipments across its territory](#), [Kyrgyz base move 'not political'](#), [Russia may allow shipment of Afghan-bound U.S. arms](#), [Russia says U.S. supplies to Afghanistan can go through its territory](#).

Obama's Approach to Afghanistan

From the campaign trail to the Oval Office, Barack Obama has pledged to make the war in Afghanistan his administration's top priority. Moving quickly, Obama appointed seasoned envoys to oversee the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan, signaling that he links peace in Afghanistan with broader regional stability. He further vowed and has now begun increasing the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan while ordering three separate strategic reviews of America's Afghan strategy. Most importantly, he has publicly begun limiting America's goals in Afghanistan, moving away from democracy-building to focusing on eliminating terrorist threats. Despite these shifts, the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan guarantees that Obama is facing a long, painful and possibly losing battle.

Despite his personal popularity, Obama's ability to sell an increased U.S. presence in Afghanistan will be difficult. A majority of Americans oppose increasing troops to Afghanistan, as do most Afghans who have already suffered significant civilian casualties since 2001. Many reports argue that increasing the U.S. military footprint will only increase Afghan's antipathy, feeding the insurgency rather than taming it. Other officials are drawing the Vietnam War analogy of "when in doubt - escalate." In that event, the U.S. risks getting bogged down and "owning" the Afghan problem for years. Finally, law-makers, including leading democrats, oppose any increase in troops without a clear role for them or an exit strategy.

The more difficult question is what U.S. troops will do in Afghanistan. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff have issued a report calling for the U.S. to limit its role to simply fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Meanwhile, others including top experts, Canada, Germany and Oxfam, argue that development and governance-building are crucial elements to creating security.

Whatever strategy Obama chooses, he will have to demonstrate a viable strategic objective if he wishes to gain the support of other countries. So far, Canada's Defence Minister Peter Mackay has resisted Washington's request to extend its mission beyond 2011. Obama has since said he will not push Canada on the issue when he visits Ottawa on 19 February. Meanwhile, Mackay called on other NATO allies to contribute more for the sake of the Alliance. Most, however, remain reluctant to increase their Afghan presence when the prospects of success are believed to diminish. Australia, one of the largest non-NATO troop contributors, is hesitant to increase its deployment arguing it will only mean prolonging their stay indefinitely. This is the same concern Obama will have to grapple with in the infancy of his presidency.

Live link to articles: [We're still figuring out our goals in Afghanistan. That's a good thing](#), [More Troops Headed to Afghanistan](#), [National Security Team Delivers Grim Appraisal of Afghanistan War](#), [Anti-War lawmakers worry over plan for Afghanistan](#), [Could Afghanistan be Obama's Vietnam?](#), [Barack Obama names his envoys to the Middle East and to Afghanistan](#), [Missions impossible](#), [Diggers urged to double offensive in Afghanistan](#), [U.S. hopes Canada will prolong its Afghan stay](#), [NATO given call to arms](#), [Pentagon study: US should pare Afghanistan goal](#), [Transcript of CBC News interview with Obama](#), [Oxfam says new U.S. strategy needed in Afghanistan](#).

Recommended Readings

A Fresh Start for Disarmament

By Reto Wollenmann, International Relations and Security Network

Previous year turned out to be especially difficult regarding disarmament within the UN organizational framework since no consensus could be found among either participants of the Conference on Disarmament or states party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. On the other hand, an ambitious undertaking was started outside the UN structure – the so-called Oslo process advocating a complete ban on cluster munitions, which is believed to have an enormous effect beyond the convention itself.

Among many things expected from the new US administration is to bring the country back as a leading force of multilateral disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation negotiations. In light of today's security challenges and the Obama administration's promise to meet them, nothing less than "deep, irreversible and verifiable cuts in the immense nuclear arsenals" would help stabilize the volatile international security environment. *Read the full article [here](#).*

War of the Future: National Defense in Cyberspace

By John Goetz, Marcel Rosenbach and Alexander Szandar, Spiegel Online, February 11, 2009

In the era of Internet and interconnectedness, while computers are used virtually in every sphere of life and people are increasingly dependent upon them, they can also become a source of potential threat by constituting a target for digital attack. U.S. experts even coined expressions such as an "electronic Pearl Harbor", a "digital Sept.11" or a "Cybergeddon" to describe this new threat to national security.

In 2007, Estonia became the first NATO member state to have been attacked digitally, with banks, government agencies and other crucial political bodies coming down under attack for a while, making some use a controversial term "cyber war". This incident prompted many countries to take measures to counter similar threats. The U.S. administration, for instance, plans to invest billions of dollars in a national cyber-defence program. Both Germany and the United States have adverse experiences with China in the field and view it as an aggressor that may soon possess an "asymmetric advantage." *Read the full article [here](#).*

New Deal with U.K. Boosts Canadian Access to Antarctic Research Stations

CBC News, February 11, 2009

A new deal was struck between Canada and the U.K., providing for an easier access for both parties to their respective research facilities in the Arctic and in the Antarctic. The memorandum of understanding was signed on February 11, 2009, which set out the rules of sharing polar infrastructure that, in its turn, will create new opportunities for joint field studies, training and shared access to scientific expertise. According to Chuck Strahl, Minister of Northern and Indian Affairs, this new initiative will underpin Canadian policies regarding various important issues, from climate change to Arctic sovereignty. Wayne Pollard, a polar scientist, also maintains that this collaboration will prove beneficial for both parties. Contrary to concerns expressed by some about its negative impact on Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, Pollard believes that the deal will actually enhance it because U.K. scientists will be Canada's guests, not the intruders. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Can Canada's Peter Mackay be secretary general?

CBC News, February 5, 2009

The race is on to find the replacement for outgoing NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. Early reports hint at the possibility that Canada's current Defence Minister, Peter Mackay, and former Foreign Minister John Manley are in the running for the top job. As a

founding member of NATO and now one of the largest troop contributing countries to Afghanistan, Canada is well respected within the Alliance. Yet despite this, being from Canada may actually hinder both candidates' chances. With an American always holding the top military position at NATO, there is a tacit understanding that a European be given the top civilian position to ensure that North America does not dominate the Alliance. The top European contenders are Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski and Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Whoever is ultimately chosen will have the task of mending a growing rift among Allies stemming from on-going feuds over burden-sharing in Afghanistan and NATO's approach to Russia and enlargement. The decision may be made as early as April during NATO's 60th Anniversary summit. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Sources: International Relations and Security Network, Global Security, Reuters, Novosti@Mail.Ru, InoSmi.Ru, Izvestia.ru, Ukrinform, Mail and Guardian, Trend News, RIA Novosti, Voice of America, CNN, NATO, Interfax, Global Security Newswire, Al Jazeera, International Herald Tribune, The Guardian, Spiegel Online, BBC News, CBC News, The Economist, Newsweek, Time, The Toronto Star, The Washington Post, Slate.com, The Australian.

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