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**The Growing War: Pakistan weighs heavily in Afghanistan**

While US President Barack Obama has yet to reveal the full extent of his Afghan strategy, one thing is certain: that taming the growing militancy in Pakistan's North-Western border region will be part of the solution. During a recent visit to NATO headquarters, Vice-President Joe Biden called on NATO Allies to come up with a comprehensive approach towards ousting al-Qaeda, Taliban and extremists from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan's ungoverned north-western tribal regions have become key safe-havens and operating bases for Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives. Canadian Defence Minister Peter Mackay sees these ungoverned areas as the cause behind the growing number of deadly attacks on NATO forces. Moreover, with 75% of all NATO supplies being shipped through Pakistan, bombings by militants have been disrupting key supplies. Signs that troop-contributing countries are taking the link between progress in Afghanistan and the deteriorating situation in Pakistan more seriously are popping up in all capitals. The U.S, France, Germany and Great Britain have already appointed special envoys to deal exclusively with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Canada's Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon promised to broach the idea for Canada to appoint its own "super-envoy," although Prime Minister Harper would prefer to wait and see if Canada is invited to join a planned Afghan-Pakistani contact-group. In the meantime, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has called for an International Summit to deal with Pakistan's future. Yet, with top officials from Washington to Canberra already using the term "Af-Pak" to refer to the war in Afghanistan, there is little doubt that Pakistan figures prominently in the minds of NATO decision-makers.

Despite this new focus on Pakistan by NATO allies, a lot will depend on what occurs inside Pakistan itself. So far, the Pakistani government and military have proven either unwilling or unable to tame the extremism. This is in part due to the fear of backlash from the populace, who increasingly decry the often indiscriminate bombings conducted by Pakistani and alleged US drone attacks on insurgent targets. There is also a significant doctrinal barrier within the Pakistani intelligence, which see an unstable Afghanistan as a key buffer between it and India. Lastly, there is also the on-going power struggle between Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and his chief opponent, Nawaz Sharif. This situation threatens to not only topple the Pakistani government, but further detract from the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. What little progress Pakistan has made in the border regions may in fact only worsen the situation for NATO forces. Western analysts fear that the recent deal to allow Islamic rule in the Swat Valley region will only create more safe-havens for Afghan insurgents. At the same time,

ceasefires between extremists and Pakistani military forces will enable insurgents to refocus on Afghanistan. What is clear is that the futures of Afghanistan and Pakistan are now inextricably linked. Failure in Afghanistan will only inspire the insurgents in Pakistan, possibly driving it down the same path to collapse, a frightful scenario given that Pakistan is a nuclear armed state. The next steps for NATO will be critical as it deals with a war which appears to have acquired a new front.

**[Live links to articles: Foreign Policy: Zardari's War, NATO plots Afghan-Pakistan Strategy, Biden warns of worsening Afghan security, Canada to push for 'super-envoy' in Afghan region, Insurgencies and Pakistan: In the face of chaos, War in need of more than tokens, Pakistan claims a victory over the Taliban, Obama and Zardari agree joint plan on region needed, Bungled raid raises doubts about Pakistan's will to fight extremism, If this becomes Obama's war, it will poison his presidency, Violence flares on Pakistani border with Afghanistan, 'Safe havens' in Pakistan fuel Afghan insurgency: Mackay.](#)**

### **Deal or no Deal? Obama Contemplates European Missile Defence**

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, global news outlets reported that US President Obama had written a secret letter to Russian President Dimitri Medvedev outlining a proposal to scrap America's planned European missile defence system in exchange for Russia's help in stopping Iran's nuclear program. The following day, President Obama denied having sent a letter with such a proposal, instead stating that it only reaffirmed his previous public stance. He said the letter aimed at reassuring Russia that the system was not directed at Moscow but rather Iran, and that if Iran no longer posed a threat, there may no longer be a need for such a system. No matter the exact content, the letter invoked a positive response from the Russian President, who announced his readiness to discuss the issue further. At the same time, he made clear that discussions regarding missile defence and Iran's nuclear program were two separate matters. For its part, the Russian media is dismissing the alleged "swap" as overly simplistic, noting that from a Russian perspective, missile defence has nothing to do with Iran and everything to do with European security, NATO relations, and nuclear parity. Russia has long held an influential role in Iran and the greater Middle East, while also being a key partner in helping Iran develop its civilian nuclear program. This largely explains why Obama is seeking its help in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The proposed missile system, a legacy of the Bush Administration, has been the cause of considerable tension between Russia, America and NATO. Russia has argued that the plan, which would have radar systems and 10 interceptor missiles placed in Poland and the Czech Republic, would undermine Russian deterrence. Since coming to office, Obama officials have stated that the US plans to continue with the planned missile shield, but only if it proves to work and be cost-effective. Unfortunately for him, with the missile defence agreements having already been signed by Poland and the Czech Republic, Obama will not be able to make a unilateral decision on the fate of the program. While Czech officials have yet to fully comment on the alleged "proposal," several have already rebuffed Russian claims that Obama's proposal signals a victory for Russian diplomacy. They will instead wait to see what Obama says during his April visit to the Czech Republic.

In an interview with national news media, Polish President Lech Kaczynski said the US cannot surrender the planned missile system in the hopes of forging better relations with Russia. He warned that because the US and Poland had already signed the bilateral agreement confirming the program, the US was obliged to install the system. Backing out of the agreement now would be "an unfriendly gesture towards Poland."

According to reporter Ryan Lucas, Poland sees the system as a key defence against Russian aggression in the face of its resurgence and recent confrontation with Georgia. Hence, while many see Obama's gesture as a sign of his intent to improve relations with Russia, his plans will have to walk a fine line between engagement of an old adversary and appeasement of fellow NATO allies.

**[Live links to articles: What Wahsington Wants From Moscow in Exchange for Missile Defence, Polish president says U.S. must honour deal on missile defence, Iran cannot be swapped for missile defence, False Starts for Star Wars Antimissile Program, Obama offers to drop missile project if Russia helps deal with Iran, Obama denies offering Russia missile shield deal, Poland frets about shield, Obama rethinks missile defence.](#)**

## **Recommended Readings**

### **France's Return to NATO: Sarkozy Breaks with De Gaulle and Tradition**

Spiegel Online International, March 12, 2009

In a seemingly inconspicuous setting, France's École Militaire, during an unremarkable conference entitled "France, European Defense and NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup>-centruy," French President Nicolas Sarkozy reversed the course of 43 years worth of history by announcing France's full return to all NATO structures. President Charles De Gaulle controversially withdrew France from NATO in March 1966, at the height of the Cold War, to demonstration that he would never allow French forces to be put under US command. Although the reunion began in 1992 when France participated in operations in Kosovo, it has never been fully integrated into all NATO bodies. Now, on the cusp NATO's 60 Anniversary, Sarkozy has ended "the French Exception" and opened the door for French officials to participate in all levels of NATO decision making, even taking over the command of two key NATO structures, transformation and rapid reaction forces. The move is supported by a majority of French citizens and is applauded by NATO allies who welcome the return of one of Europe's biggest nations. The French return will be officially celebrated in April during the NATO summit in Strasbourg/Kehl. **Read the full article [here](#).**

### **Obama's blockbuster gift for Brown: 25 classic films, and, US gesture lost in Russian translation**

London Evening Standar, March 3, 2009 and International Herald Tribune, March 6, 2009

Gift giving does not appear to be the Obama administration's strong-suit. During a visit by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to the White House early this month, President Obama may have revealed a weakness – his gift giving ability. Prime Minister Brown presented Obama with three rare and thoughtful gifts, a pen holder made from the wood of a former Victorian-era anti-slave ship, a framed commission for the HMS Resolute, a ship which has come to symbolize US-Anglo friendship ( and also the wood used to make President Obama's desk ), and a first-edition seven-volume biography of Winston Churchill. Even the first children, Sasha and Malia, were presented with British made clothing and books in a gesture to promote British exports. In return, Gordon Brown received a box-set of 25 classic American movies and two plastic replicas of Marine One, the Presidential helicopter. While Brown's gifts have already received places of honour in the Oval Office, it is unclear what Mr. Brown, who has stated previously that he is no movie buff, will do with his gift.

Meanwhile, during her first highly publicized meeting with Russian counter-part Sergey Lavrov, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton presented him with a bright red “button” inscribed with the word “peregruzka”, Russian for “reset” – or so she thought. In reality, Minister Lavrov politely informed her that the word actually meant “overload.” Clinton was attempting to play off the words used by Vice-President Joe Biden when he vowed America would “reset” its relationship with Russia after having suffered severe strains during the Bush Administration. Despite the blunder, both leaders laughed it off and acknowledge their genuine desire to improve the relationship, particularly in the area of arms control and NATO consultation. **Read the full article [here](#) and [here](#).**

**U.S. weighs Iran route for NATO supplies, and, NATO may ask China for support in Afghanistan**

International Herald Tribune, March 12 and 2, 2009

NATO logisticians are considering using routes passing through Iran to supply its forces in Afghanistan. The move is primarily intended to seek alternative routes to the ones currently being used in Russia and Pakistan. The Khyber Pass in Pakistan is coming increasingly under attack while supplementing Russian routes is being sold as a means of preventing a “single-point failure.” Although other routes have been examined, mostly through Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Iranian port of Chabahar is so far considered the shortest and safest alternative. This puts the US in a delicate situation given the decades-old freeze in US-Iranian relations. Nonetheless, Pentagon officials and NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, US General John Craddock, confirmed that there will be no objection if individual NATO countries conclude bilateral deals with Iran. The US is still scrambling to deal with the loss of its air base in Kyrgyzstan after Russia offered the country a substantial economic incentive to cancel its lease with America. Since then, there has been considerable concern over Russian interference with NATO’s operations in Afghanistan and its ability to coerce the Alliance over the use of its territory for supply links. NATO officials have also indicated that they are considering asking China to open up a supply route to Afghanistan. China shares a 76-kilometre border with Afghanistan in a mountainous region once used as a passage by explorer Marco Polo. **Read the full article [here](#) and [here](#).**

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**Sources:** International Herald Tribune, The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, Time, The Guardian, RIA Novosti, The Washington Post, Spiegel Online, International Herald Tribune, Evening Standard, Prague Post, The Economist, Foreign Policy, The Globe and Mail, Newsweek, Metro, Gazeta Wyborcza, CNN

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