

## **In Focus Transatlantic News Digest**

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### **NATO's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit**

On April 2-3, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) held its annual Summit which also marked the Alliance's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was an important milestone which gave the Alliance members an opportunity to honour NATO's past while re-examining its future in the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century security challenges.

#### **Highlights**

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of NATO, the annual summit was permeated with symbolic meanings, beginning with Strasbourg/Kehl, the French and German cities which played host to the summit. The fact that once bitter enemies were now co-hosting the anniversary summit was just one of the many testimonies to the successes achieved by the Alliance. In addition, to formally recognize France's return to NATO's integrated military command, French President Sarkozy met NATO Secretary General and the rest of the NATO heads of state and government halfway across the bridge which connects Germany to France. The ceremony was concluded with the leaders paying tribute to the over 70,000 men and women who lost their lives in past and present NATO operations.

Despite the ceremonial atmosphere, NATO leaders turned their attention to pressing issues facing the Alliance, particularly regarding Afghanistan, the modernization of capabilities, and increasing the Alliance's engagement with other international organizations, such as the European Union and the United Nations. The NATO-Russia partnership also took a prominent role as leaders tried to formally restore dialogue after it was halted following the brief Russian-Georgia conflict in August 2008. Encouraged in part by a new US administration which is more open to dialogue, as well as the common recognition that NATO and Russia share common security interests, all parties agreed to resume the NATO-Russia Council and make it the centre for strategic and political dialogue. Finally, the process to begin writing NATO's new Strategic Concept was launched. The document will become the Alliance's new guiding policy and will define its role within the new and unpredictable security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **NATO Welcomes New Members**

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Albania and Croatia formally joined the NATO Alliance, bringing the total number of members to 28. In completing the accession process, both countries are

now fully involved in NATO's political and strategic decision-making process, and can benefit from, as well as contribute to, the collective security clause. At the NATO Summit, President Topi and Prime Minister Berisha of Albania, as well as President Mesic and Prime Minister Sanader of Croatia were warmly welcomed by the Secretary General, while US President Barack Obama presented each country with a copy of NATO's founding document, the Washington Treaty. To finalize the accession process, a ceremony was held on April 7<sup>th</sup> at NATO Headquarters where the Albanian and Croatian flags were raised in the presence of their respective Prime Ministers.

### **NATO Afghan Mission**

Talks on Afghanistan played high on the Summit agenda, notably being used by President Obama to announce the details of his new Afghan strategy. Despite his desire to press NATO allies to make greater long-term troop commitments, he was largely unsuccessful. Consequently, many believe that this will likely lead to a greater "Americanization" of the military effort in Afghanistan.

Despite this, leaders were nonetheless able to come to some important decisions regarding Afghanistan, which will boost the mission in the short term. These include:

- a significant expansion of the training and support effort for Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)
- enhanced engagement with neighboring countries (especially Pakistan)
- a more integrated approach to working with International Community and the Afghan government to implement the Afghan National Development Strategy

To achieve those objectives, up to 5,000 additional military forces will be sent to support the upcoming Afghan elections, as well as for training and mentoring of the ANSF. Allies will also send more civilian aid for various purposes. In addition, a NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) will be established to effectively train the Afghan National Army (ANA) and mentor the Afghan National Police, while the ANA Trust Fund will be expanded to allow the army to grow in size and efficiency. NATO Allies also acknowledged the need to balance military gains with civilian efforts, particularly in an effort to achieve economically sustainable growth and stability. They hence welcomed the renewal of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). To read the ***Summit Declaration on Afghanistan***, click [here](#).

### **New Secretary General Selected**

At the Summit, Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen was selected to be the next NATO Secretary General. The deliberations proved much more contentious than predicted, requiring last minute diplomacy on the part of President Obama to convince Turkey to withdraw their opposition towards his candidacy. Turkey remained opposed to Rasmussen in part because of his association with the infamous cartoon of Prophet Mohammed and their belief his chairmanship would send the wrong message to the Muslim World. Rasmussen will formally take up his duties on August 1, 2009.

***Live links to articles:*** [NATO Official Homepage](#), [Afghanistan, US Leadership Dominate NATO's Historic 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit](#), [Obama Hails Results of NATO Summit](#), [NATO at 60 - Honors Past; Looks to Future](#), [NATO Leaders Agree on Secretary-General, Afghanistan](#), [NATO Leaders Gather for Summit](#), [New NATO chief pledges conciliation with Muslims](#), [NATO backs Obama Afghan plan, but troops short-term](#), [FACTBOX-Commitments to Afghanistan from NATO summit](#), [NATO and the Responsibility to Protect](#), [Danish PM Rasmussen To Be NATO Secretary General](#),

[NATO Meeting to Highlight Strains on Afghanistan, NATO allies pledge more non-combat troops for Afghanistan.](#)

### **New Afghan Law May Decide the Fate of NATO's Mission**

Like the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan was part of the Bush Administration's larger campaign against terrorism. But unlike Iraq, the Afghan campaign maintained greater international support and legitimacy, largely because of the long held belief that coalition forces would fundamentally improve the human rights of the Afghan people, who were suffering under the rule of the Taliban regime. This belief, however, was dealt a severe blow when it was revealed that the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, signed a law which would impose severe restrictions on Shiite women. Under the Shiite Personal Status Law, women would be forbidden to leave their houses without permission from their husbands, while further being required to "give positive responses to the sexual desires of their husbands." Human Rights groups are already touting this as a significant step backwards, and some referring to it as the re-Talibanization of Afghanistan.

The timing of the law came just as NATO heads of state met in Strasbourg/Kehl to decide the fate of their Afghan commitment. The anger among the leaders was palpable, leading the NATO Secretary General to publicly confess that this development would make it more difficult for NATO to boost its troop levels. "How can I defend...that our boys and girls are dying there in defence of universal values," he said if the law was allowed to be enacted. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper came out vocally against the law and called on Karzai to consider a significant re-examination of the law. Harper echoed the NATO Secretary General when he said it would clearly diminish Allied support for the mission.

Signs of blow back are already appearing. Italy's defence minister has suggested his country might temporarily withdraw all its female soldiers from Afghanistan to protest the law. Germany's Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid has called for restrictions on further aid to Afghanistan. In Canada, a poll conducted by Harris-Decima revealed that 75% of Canadians would oppose the Afghan mission if the law were not reversed. This would make it extremely difficult for PM Harper to keep Canada committed until 2011.

Considering President Karzai is facing an upcoming election while suffering from dwindling support, many believe that he passed the law in an attempt to win the vote of ultra-conservatives and the Shiite population. Although he defends his actions by saying that the western media has misinterpreted the law, the fact that it has been praised by Taliban leaders only worsens his cause. He has, however, called for its review, a move which stalls it from being enacted.

Despite the West's repugnance, the situation highlights a fundamental contradiction which exists between sovereignty and human rights. Indeed, Shiite Cleric Mohammad Asif Mohseni, one of the laws drafters, uses this paradox when he slams the West for its attempt to meddle in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country. Surrounded by alleged supporters of the law, the cleric claimed the West's demand to have the law reversed as an attempt to "thwart democracy when results do not please them." In this difficult situation, it is clear that the NATO alliance will be tested on how much it is both a military alliance, and a defender of common values. Some believe, however, that this was the excuse many NATO leaders were looking for to begin ending their mission to Afghanistan.

**Live links to articles:** [Legalized Oppression of Woman: Western Outrage over Discriminatory Afghan Law](#), [Germany's Merkel blasts Afghan law](#), [Italy considers withdrawing female troops from Afghanistan](#), [Obama, NATO pressure Karzai over law on woman](#), [Afghan cleric defends 'rape' law](#), [Rape law hurting efforts to sell NATO role in Afghanistan: NATO chief](#), [Rape law saps support for Afghan mission, poll finds](#), [U.S., U.N. concerned about Afghan Shi'ite law](#), [New Afghan law worries NATO chief](#).

## **Recommended Readings**

### **Fifth Day of Anti-Saakashvili Protests in Georgia**

Euro News, April 13, 2009 and Voice of America News, April 13, 2009

In Georgia's capital Tbilisi, tens of thousands of opposition protesters are determined to demonstrate their discontent in regards to the deteriorating democracy under the leadership of the President Mikhail Saakashvili. Having been protesting for five days already, they even moved their demonstration from in front of the parliament building to outside the president's office "so he will hear them better." According to the former Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili, they intend to stay there until the president resigns, partially in defiance of the propaganda disseminated outside the country that this movement was losing popular support.

Opposition leaders accuse Saakashvili of having monopolized power and becoming increasingly authoritarian by using pressure to influence the media and the judiciary. Moreover, he is perceived as having mishandled last year's military confrontation with Russia and overall having made too many mistakes to remain in the office. President Saakashvili, however, asserted that he would not yield to the demands of the protesters and would not step down before the end of his second term in 2013. In the meantime, he offered to negotiate with the opposition. ***Read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).***

### **Unrest in Moldova brings complicated state into international focus**

Deutsche Welle, April 8, 2009 and BBC News Europe, April 8, 2009

An unexpected, yet nonetheless disturbing protest erupted in the Moldovan capitol of Chisinau following Parliamentary Elections on April 5<sup>th</sup>. The capital was quickly swarmed by over 15,000 protesters who descended on the Parliament and offices of the Communist President, Vladimir Voronin. The demonstrators were protesting what they believed were rigged elections which saw the ruling Communist party capture 50% of the vote, with the nearest opponent claiming 13%. Although the Organizations for Security and Cooperation monitored the elections and declared that they were largely satisfactory, the accusations of election fraud are likely to have fuelled already mounting tensions.

Moldova has a complicated and yet undecided history which is now being played out in a tug of war between the West and the East. Once being part of Romania and sharing a similar language and culture, the Former Soviet Republic has been struggling since 1991 to find its identity. While many would like to see Moldova reunite with Romania, Voronin has deliberately suspended Moldova within an "institutional indecisiveness." At the same time as he portrays himself as a pro-Western leader by signing the European Union's Action Plan, which would begin the process of accession talks, Voronin also maintains close ties to Moscow.

Consequently, this creates a three-way struggle between Romania, Russia and greater EU integration. The frustration of this identity crisis is primarily what is believed to have caused these latest protests. Experts in the meantime do not believe that these protests will stroke significant revolutionary rumblings, or even lead to regime change given the lack of organization among protesters and the continued genuine support for the Communist government among Moldovans. ***Read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).***

***Sources:*** International Relations and Security Network, Global Security, Reuters, Novosti@Mail.Ru, Trend News, RIA Novosti, Voice of America, CNN, Global Security Newswire, Al Jazeera, International Herald Tribune, The Guardian, CBC News, Calgary Herald, Euro News, BBC News, Defense News, NATO, Deutsche Welle, The Washington Post, The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, Spiegel Online International, Adelaide Now, DW-World.