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Presidential Election in Ukraine: Viktor Yanukovich vs. Yulia Tymoshenko

By: Tanah Sullivan

February 7, 2010, will mark the beginning of a new era for Ukraine as the country votes in a new president. The outcome of the elections will determine the extent of Ukrainian rapprochement with the Russian sphere of influence, given that neither of the two contenders seem willing to loosen ties with Moscow.

Relations between Ukraine and Russia have soured in recent years following Ukraine's NATO-bid, gas disputes, and a range of other obstacles. Yet all this seems set to change as each presidential candidate is reflecting Ukraine's desire to re-establish closer relations with Russia, even at the risk of possibly hindering its ties to NATO and Europe. In fact, Moscow is publicly supporting Viktor Yanukovich, and has a working agreement with Yulia Tymoshenko. The first round of elections on January 17 put Yanukovich in the lead amassing 36% of the vote, followed by Tymoshenko with 25%, while the current president Viktor Yuschenko trailed behind with only 6-10% of the vote.

Under the leadership of Yuschenko— as some referred to as the 'pro-Western hero of the Orange Revolution'—Ukraine has experienced near-bankruptcy, corruption, weak governance and an elusive rule of law, contrary to the economic and judicial reforms initially promised by Yuschenko at the 2004 elections. *The Economist* January 2010 issue reported that Ukraine is now ranked below Russia and Belarus on the most recent global index of economic freedom, placing it 17th out of 183 from the bottom of the list. This has caused a sharp increase in grievances amongst the civil population, who are understandably skeptical of how the new president will point Ukraine back in the right direction. Given the lack of positive outcomes generated by the previous pro-Western allied government, the low voter turn-out supporting Yuschenko was therefore not surprising.

Both Yanukovich and Tymoshenko have asserted that they will be strengthening ties with Russia, which would imply a significant change in focus for Ukrainian foreign policy replacing Yuschenko's pro-Western administration. During Yuschenko's term, the idea of Ukraine joining NATO was also reported as

a positive step for the country. Although the two candidates are unlikely to continue where Yushenko left off, mostly due to reports of the opposition of Ukrainians to the idea rather than Russia's objection, it has been reported that they have both advocated for moving closer towards the EU. Reports suggest that both candidates are seeking to build stronger ties with Europe without antagonizing relations with Russia in a mutually-beneficial partnership. An article on the EurActiv Network reported that Tymoshenko has pledged to secure Ukraine's membership to the EU should she be elected.

Putting political, economic and military reasons aside and shifting focus to Ukraine's severe winters, the threat of Russia cutting off its gas supplies (again) may have been enough of an appeal to Ukrainians to support a renewal of Russian ties. Furthermore, a Moscow-backed president does not necessarily entail a hindrance to Ukraine's democratic potential. In fact, it may just be an important turn on the tough road to democracy for Ukraine. The outcome of the Ukrainian presidential elections is deemed a cause for concern to the Kremlin, as many suggest that having Ukraine as an ally is of critical geopolitical importance to Russia's strategy of re-asserting itself in the international arena.

The significance of the Ukrainian presidential elections globally is also evident through the participation of foreign government officials (including several Canadian MPs) volunteering to monitor the elections to ensure they are conducted fairly and accurately. Regardless of the outcome however, the next leader will have to ensure that the country is ready for its journey to a healthy democracy. After years of political crisis, Ukrainians are seemingly taking this election in stride. The protester's tents that not so long ago were a fixture of Ukraine's political life have been absent. And on paper, both candidates promise reform, which will hopefully overshadow the failures of Yushenko's leadership and years of political turmoil that left Ukrainians disillusioned and concerned for the future of their country.

[Pro-Russian Candidate Wins First Round of Ukrainian Election](#), [Ukraine's Election and the Russian Resurgence](#), [Ukraine's Presidential Election: An Orange and Two Lemons](#), [Five Years on in Kiev](#), [Ukraine's predicament: Oranges are not the only fruit](#), [Yanukovich, Tymoshenko go into Ukraine runoff election Feb. 7](#), [Ukraine presidential election heads for second round](#), [Ukraine election: And then there were two](#), [Ukraine elections focuses European minds on gas](#), [Pro-Russia Yanukovich takes lead in Ukrainian elections](#), [Ukraine presidential hopeful plays EU accession card](#)

Talking with the Taliban

By: Jonathan Preece

Earlier this week NATO's commander in Afghanistan General Stanley McChrystal indicated that the US military's surge in Afghanistan could pave the way for a political end to the Afghan conflict. "I think any Afghans can play a role [in governing Afghanistan] if they focus on the future, and not on the past," McChrystal told the *Financial Times*. Echoing such sentiments, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates alluded to the possibility of future negotiations with the Taliban by describing them as part of Afghanistan's "political fabric." These statements were significant in that they signaled what appears to be a long-term political strategy to end hostilities in Afghanistan. McChrystal and Gates are not the first to propose diplomatic engagement with the Taliban. The head of the UN mission in Afghanistan Kai Eide has long emphasized the importance of face-to-face talks between Taliban and allied leaders; "If you want relevant results, then you have to talk to the relevant person in authority...I think the time has come to do it." Indeed this rationale took center stage Thursday, January 28th as foreign ministers from 65 different countries descended on London to discuss the future of Afghanistan.

On the conference agenda was a significant new effort designed to reintegrate moderate Taliban fighters into mainstream Afghan society. This controversial "Reintegration and Reconciliation Program" headed by the Afghan government in coordination with its NATO allies will use a US\$500-million fund to provide moderate Taliban fighters cash jobs, security and the option of resettlement in exchange for renouncing violence against the Afghan government, NATO troops and severing all connections with al-Qaeda. This program is based on the understanding that up to 80% of those insurgents who support the Taliban do so either because of financial incentives or due to local grievances with the Afghan government.

President Karzai hopes that this program will have the effect of reintegrating as many as 35,000 fighters into mainstream Afghan life. While the Reintegration and Reconciliation Program has garnered criticism from some – as illustrated by protests accompanying the London conference – this initiative has gained backing from NATO allies, including Turkey, as well as other regional neighboring powers such as China and Pakistan. In fact Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi went as far as to suggest that Pakistan could play the role of mediator in reconciliation talks between Western allies and the Taliban: "Pakistan is perhaps better placed than any other country in the world to support Afghan reintegration and reconciliation...If asked, the government of Pakistan would be happy to facilitate."

In addition to announcing plans to bring a political end to the conflict in Afghanistan, the London conference also outlined a timetable for expanding Afghan security forces and transferring security responsibilities to the Afghan government. The international community agreed that the security handover should proceed "as rapidly as possible" with Afghan forces gaining primary control over security in a number of provinces by 2011 and gaining full control over security operations in five years time. In order to make this transition possible, representatives agreed to fund 171,600 Afghan soldiers and 134,000 policemen by October of next year. While the conference did not discuss timelines for withdrawal, it did emphasize the international community's commitment to Afghanistan: "over the next few years the nature of international support should evolve...from direct action to support."

Sources: [US Commander says Troops Surge has made talks possible over Afghanistan](#), [Canada won't Commit Money to Taliban Fund: Cannon](#), [Taliban Job Fund set for Launch](#), [Afghanistan Denies Tensions After Iran Shuns London Conference](#), [Pakistan offers to help in talks between Western alliance and Taliban](#), [Afghanistan to take over Security Operations within Years](#)

Turkey's Role in Afghanistan

By: Luisa Sargsyan

Turkey is a country that has deep and longstanding ties with Afghanistan. The relations between the two countries have always been very warm due to the ethnic and historical links and have remained strong following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2002.

Afghanistan was the first country to recognize the modern Turkish Republic after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It also delivered some military aid to Kemal Ataturk, Turkey's first president, during war in the early 1920s. Now that Turkey has developed into a secular Muslim nation with a capitalist infrastructure, it is eager to serve as a model for Afghanistan.

In January 2006, Turkey hosted Afghan President Hamid Karzai for a two-day visit aimed at strengthening ties between Ankara and Kabul. This was the first official visit by an Afghan leader since 1928. An important step taken during this visit was the signing of a long awaited protocol on the establishment of a Program Coordination Office of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TIKA) in Kabul. The Agency is responsible for the coordination of the financial assistance from Turkey (some \$11.6 million) to Afghanistan. In 2006, a total of 66 projects were implemented by TIKA in Afghanistan.

Turkey is one of the major supporters of the post-Taliban reconstruction process in Afghanistan and the country has been determined to press ahead with its contributions to ensure Afghanistan's long lasting stability. The Turkish military has played a leading role in re-establishing the Afghan National Army. The country has led the International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) twice: first in June 2002-February 2003 and then in February-November 2005.

The only Muslim nation in NATO, Turkey has deployed 1,755 troops in Afghanistan and promised to send 1,000 more. Its presence in the country includes ISAF Command Headquarters, Kabul International Airport, Regional Command Capital, Regional Command East (Wardak, where Turkey operates a PRT), and Regional Command North. Turkey has established a joint headquarters with France and Italy to provide for the security of Kabul.

Just a few days ago, on January 25th, Turkey hosted a regional summit on Afghanistan. Intelligence and military officials from Afghanistan and Pakistan gathered in Istanbul to discuss security issues related to the war-torn Afghanistan. Turkey has been working behind the scenes to reconcile the two countries with a history of deep mutual mistrust. Meetings with the Iranian vice-president and the Chinese foreign minister followed. David Miliband, the British foreign minister, Richard Holbrooke, the US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as Russian deputy prime minister Igor Sechin also attended the summit.

Turkey's President Abdullah Gul, during his meeting with Afghan President Karzai, said that his country is setting up a military-run Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Northern Province of Jauzjan to help in the reconstruction efforts.

This is the fourth summit in a row since 2007. The first three were held in April 2007, December 2008, and April 2009. Observers think that this summit was meant to pave the way for the January 28 London conference on Afghanistan aimed at setting a timetable for transferring responsibility for some areas to Afghan government control.

Over the last few years, Turkey has warned the international community that using military means to bring stability to this war-torn country won't work without a strong civilian assistance that will enable Afghanistan to stand on its own feet. The country has repeatedly rejected US calls to send combat troops to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan's lawless southern and eastern regions, saying that it would instead contribute primarily to peacekeeping and infrastructure projects.

It seems that Ankara's efforts have eventually yielded fruit: the significance of a stronger civilian presence in Afghanistan was emphasized in the final communiqué of the London conference: "Afghanistan faces formidable development challenges, which require sustained, long-term support from the international community. A better coordinated and resourced civilian effort is critical to overcoming these challenges. Economic growth, respect for Rule of Law and human rights alongside creation of employment opportunities, and good governance for all Afghans are also critical to counter the appeal of the insurgency, as well as being vital to greater stability in Afghanistan." (*Full text of the Communiqué is available [here](#)*).

Sources: [Turkish troops train Afghan forces](#), [Turkey hosts Pakistani-Afghan summit](#), [London Conference Supports Afghan Reconciliation and Handover Strategy](#), [Turkish Foreign Minister Stresses Importance of Cooperation for Afghanistan](#), [President Karzai meets with Turkish president](#), [Conference on Afghanistan opens in London](#), [London communiqué on Afghanistan imbued with Turkey flavor](#)

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Military might not the only solution

By: Kevin McGurgan

Why are American, British and other European troops fighting several thousand miles away from home in Afghanistan?

The core reason is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a haven for international terrorism again. Although our men and women serve far away, we must not forget that their work relates directly to our safety and security in America and Europe. Events like the failed Christmas Day attack remind us that al Qaeda and its allies now try to operate in other countries, too -- but Afghanistan's border region is their historic home and is where we must take them on first and foremost. [Read the full text here](#).

Georgian Offer Of Afghan Transit Unlikely To Tempt NATO

By: Ahto Lobjakas

The United States generally welcomes all assistance in Afghanistan; where Washington is leading NATO efforts in a high-stakes struggle to stabilize the country.

Georgia, however, may prove the exception. It has twice offered its territory as a potential transit corridor for Western military shipments to Afghanistan -- first in February 2009, and again this week, when

President Mikheil Saakashvili revived the proposal in an interview with the Associated Press. [Read the full text here.](#)

Moscow Offers a Zero-Sum Trade-off on Contentious Issues

By: Pavel Felgenhauer

This week, the First Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the General Staff Army-General Nikolai Makarov attended a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in Brussels and accepted a framework agreement to resume full-scale defense cooperation with the Alliance. This was the first meeting of the NRC at the level of chiefs of staff since the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. After the short war with Georgia, NATO announced that it would not resume military cooperation before Russia withdraws its troops to the positions they occupied antebellum, in accordance with the ceasefire agreement President Dmitry Medvedev signed on August 12, 2008. [Read the full text here.](#)

Sources: Al-Jazeera Network, BBC, Bloomberg, The Christian Science Monitor, CNN, International Crisis Group, International Herald Tribune, CBC, The Economist, The Guardian, Time, Wall Street Journal, Euractiv.com

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