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EDITOR:

James Marcus Bridger
James.Bridger@atlantic-council.ca

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NATO Update

By: Tom Aagaard

While the tempo of NATO activity has slowed since the end of Operation Unified Protector, the Alliance remains busy on a number of fronts.

Attempts by Kosovo Force (KFOR) to restore freedom of movement in northern Kosovo turned violent last Thursday, leaving 21 NATO soldiers injured. Ethnic Serb protestors resisted attempts by Alliance peacekeepers to dismantle roadblocks by throwing rocks and driving trucks loaded with gravel at them; actions which were responded to with batons, tear gas, and warning shots. In the face of escalating violence, the decision was made to abort the mission and pull back the NATO forces. Violence has flared up several times since the ethnic Albanian-dominated government in Pristina began trying to assert control over the northern border with Serbia this summer. Much of the population in the area is ethnically Serbian and rejects the idea that Kosovo is an independent country. In light of the continuing unrest, KFOR has abandoned its plans to gradually scale down its deployment, currently numbering approximately 5 500 troops.

This Wednesday, Audronius Azubalis, Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), addressed the North Atlantic Council ahead of NATO's Ministerial Council this December. Highlighting the complementary nature of the two organizations' partnership in areas such as arms control, democratic institution building, and cyber security, Azubalis said that there was still "untapped potential" for OSCE-NATO cooperation, especially in the Mediterranean and Eurasia.

While the political debate over Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) grows increasingly tense with Russian President Medvedev's recent threat to deploy new missiles in Kaliningrad (see page two), the Alliance just revealed that its Active Layered Theatre Missile Defence (ALTBMD) passed an important milestone earlier this month. As part of the German-led exercise "Rapid Arrow 2011," a live ballistic missile was detected, tracked, and destroyed by NATO forces. The process began when the destroyer *USS Sullivan's* powerful AEGIS radar picked up the missile in flight over the Mediterranean. The ship alerted the Ballistic Missile Defence command and control centre in Ramstein, Germany, which relayed the target information to a German Patriot missile battery in Crete, Greece, which successfully engaged the missile.

While many BMD tests focus on the physical challenges involved in successfully intercepting a target travelling at hypersonic speeds, this test was important for demonstrating the feasibility of the NATO program to integrate a wide variety of partner countries' sensors and missiles into a coherent missile defence umbrella.

The entire sequence of events, from the launch of the missile to its destruction, took place in about five minutes, highlighting the fact that with such a tight timeframe, seamless system interoperability and command and control is critical. To quote Lieutenant General Friedrich Ploeger, "we can't pick up the phone and dial some number...everything must be functioning perfectly." ALTBMD program head Alessandro Pera expressed his satisfaction with the outcome, stating that it "strengthens our confidence in the ability to deliver an interim territorial missile defence capability to NATO very soon." While the initial goal of the program is to protect NATO forces from short- and medium- range missile attack, the Alliance hopes to gradually improve the system to the point where it can serve as a comprehensive shield for NATO territory and populations.

Officials from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan are investigating an airstrike that went tragically wrong in Kandahar Province on Wednesday. The strike left seven civilians dead, six of them children. An Afghan government spokesperson claims the incident occurred when a group of insurgents, caught planting mines by an overhead aircraft, fled into a street where children were playing, locals have disputed this version of events however. Recognizing the immense detrimental impact of collateral damage on winning Afghan "hearts and minds," rules around airstrikes have been significantly tightened since the beginning of the ISAF mission.

Further Reading: [OSCE Chairman-in-Office addressed the North Atlantic Council](#), [Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence Programme](#), [NATO commanders successfully test command and control systems during intercept exercise](#) , [Six Afghan Children Are Killed in NATO Airstrike](#), [21 KFOR Soldiers injured in Kosovo](#)

A Modern Missile Gap

By: Simon Miles

Russia will deploy its own missiles, with enhanced missile defence penetration technology, if the US and NATO do not halt in their project for a pan-European missile defence network, President Dimitri Medvedev warned. Furthermore, the western enclave of Kaliningrad will be host to a new arsenal of tactical weapons. With obvious relish, a spokesman for the Western Military District declared that the newly-released Iskander missile (replacing the Tochka weapons in service since the mid-1970s) "outperforms its predecessor in all characteristics, including its flight range, target accuracy, warhead weight, ammunition quantity and its speed of movement on paved roads, as well as the cross-country terrain," and possesses the "ability to overpower the existing and future missile defence shields of foreign states."

At issue is a plan, originally proposed by the Bush administration but now considerably watered-down by President Barack Obama, to defend against a potential missile attack by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. An agreement has been reached to station 24 interceptor missiles in Romania and Poland and sophisticated radar arrays in the Czech Republic and Turkey, all NATO allies. Russia, however, believes that that system could be used against its intercontinental ballistic missiles and has demanded assurance in writing that this would not be the case. American negotiators refuse to agree to any such restrictions.

This is in stark contrast to the hopes espoused at the 2010 Lisbon Summit that Russia might be a partner in such a missile shield. Why have the two sides not been able to come to an agreement on the question of a missile shield? The Russian side's argument is quite simple: NATO's "old-fashioned logic" hampers an agreement, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko opined. NATO's assurances (chiefly emanating from the US) that the missile shield is not anti-Russian in nature have fallen on deaf ears in the Kremlin.

“Russia’s political leadership has repeatedly said that unless we resolve the situation, Russia will be forced to adopt a military-technical response,” Dmitry Rogozin, the country’s outspoken ambassador to NATO, told reporters in Moscow. “We can’t afford to barter away our citizens’ security.”

In the midst of an election in Russia, it is highly improbable that the topic will be dropped by Putin or Medvedev. Anti-American and anti-NATO sentiment is generally well-received amongst the Russian public, and over so tense an issue Putin is likely to find considerable support for his and Medvedev’s position. Furthermore, the military posturing which the Russian government is currently embracing plays well in the press there. This is, after all, compounding upon the extremely negative Russian reaction to NATO’s admittedly broad interpretation of the UN Security Council resolution on Libya.

In conclusion, the outlook for a breakthrough on this highly-contentious issue is bleak. The core issue is an absence of trust. Russian leaders simply refuse to believe that the planned defence shield is not in some way designed to negate their own nuclear weapons and place them in a position of weakness. In this situation, public diplomacy is an absolute must for the Alliance to make a case for cooperation to Russian civil society. It is clear that there is not a great volition for cooperation within the Russian government, a mindset that will likely remain entrenched so long as the political scene continues to be dominated by Vladimir Putin. However, as states such as Iran grow increasingly belligerent, it is possible that that the Russian populace will see the value of putting security and cooperation ahead of petty rivalries.

Further Reading: [Russian plans capability to strike US shield, Medvedev says](#); [Russia takes Cold War tone with US on European missile defence](#); [Russia and NATO: An absence of trust](#); [In nod to European missile defense, Russia rolls out Iskander missiles](#); [Russian response to NATO missile defense to be 'reasonable' – Medvedev](#)

Yemen’s Saleh: Really Gone for Good?

By: Nabila F. Qureshi

After 33 years of autocratic rule, Yemen’s President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed an agreement on Wednesday to step down. The deal, brokered by the Gulf Co-operation Council and the United Nations, will allow for the Yemeni vice-president to negotiate a power transfer to the opposition, making Saleh the fourth leader to be forced from power in the Middle East due to popular uprisings. Following months of broken promises to resign and skillful political maneuvering, Saleh’s agreement to the deal has taken Yemeni citizens by surprise. The agreement, however, offers no guarantee that stability will be restored to an impoverished nation deeply fractured by political crisis, nor that the kind of substantive political change sought by protesters will be realized.

With security and humanitarian conditions in the country deteriorating at an alarming rate, the US, other Western nations, and Gulf state leaders aggressively urged for the agreement to be made and signed by Saleh. Terms of the deal include a presidential election to be held in three months—though the vice president is expected to be the only candidate running. It appears that what may have finally motivated Saleh to concede power was the threat of sanctions from states increasingly frustrated by his unwillingness to leave and, more controversially, the promise that he and his family will be immune from prosecution.

Reactions among protesters were mixed. While some rejoiced at the news, many were far more cynical: Saleh has backed out of stepping down three times in the past. Even if he holds true to the agreement this time, many believe that the deal will bring no real change. Rather, as the less optimistic argue, the agreement would maintain the status quo by preserving elites—including Saleh and his family—in positions of power. It is unclear how forceful a political presence Saleh will retain after stepping down, but few feel that abandoning his position as president necessarily translates to an end to his political

ambitions. As Abdul-Ghani al-Iryani, a Yemeni political activist put it, “[Saleh] figures the rest of the maneuvering can be kept for after the signing.” Members of Saleh’s family, moreover, continue to exert considerable influence: his son and three nephews retain key positions in the military and intelligence services, while other family members dominate the economy through the private and public companies they run.

Further threatening prospects for change, as sought by Yemeni protesters, is the political mess that Saleh leaves behind. He maintained power for decades by exploiting rivalries between various factions, and by creating a patronage system that he alone controlled. The result has been weak institutions and a sterile political environment plagued by a lack of trust between opponents. Conflict between government forces and rival factions struggling for power, meanwhile, has led to the loss of hundreds of lives, and brought the already impoverished state to the brink of civil war.

Perhaps the strongest indication that challenges for Yemen are not yet over is the simple fact that, despite the signing of the agreement, thousands of Yemenis are still camped out in tents across the capital. They do not trust Saleh, and demand more fundamental change than what has been stipulated in the agreement; whether and how such change is achieved remains to be seen.

Further reading: [Yemen’s Leader Agrees to End 3-Decade Rule](#); [Yemen’s Saleh agrees to transfer power](#); [Analysis: Saleh, quitting or dancing on the heads of snakes](#).

Syrian Strategy: Shoot to Kill

By: Jason Wiseman

As President Assad’s brutal crackdown continues into its eighth month, recent events have increased pressure on the Syrian regime. With over 3 500 people killed, more than 20 000 seeking refuge in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and roughly 15 000 mid and low ranking soldiers defecting to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Bashar al-Assad’s regime is in a state of unprecedented peril.

Critical to understanding the situation inside Syria is the delicate balance of power within the Assad regime. The ruling Alawite clan jealously guards any position of major influence while co-opting other minority groups into significant postings to stem opposition from the Sunni majority while creating co-dependence amongst Syria’s minorities. Seeing that opposition showed no signs of stopping, the Assad regime immediately recognized that its delicate power structure faced complete destruction in the event that they failed to crush the opposition by force.

As a pariah in the international community and an outcast even amongst the Arab world, Syria’s influence rests on a delicate balance of Iranian patronage, sponsorship for various terrorist groups and prominent political influence in Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The international community’s response to Assad’s violent crackdown has centered on condemnation and sanctions, stopping short of promoting any military intervention. In addition to mounting pressure from the international community, the Arab League, led by the Gulf States, have recalled many of their representatives and threatened additional sanctions in the event that Assad continues with his crackdown.

Intense international pressure has led Assad to seek Russian and Chinese support in an effort to stem foreign intervention and water down any Security Council resolutions targeting Syria. In addition, three Russian warships entered Syrian territorial waters outside Tartus port on 21 November in a coordinated effort to undermine any NATO action against Syria. On the domestic front, the Assad regime has also welcomed Iranian military advisers and equipment in helping to put down the uprising by force. The ongoing cooperation between Russia, Syria and Iran has weighed heavily on the minds of Syria’s

adversaries, raising the threat of massive instability and terrorism spreading in the event that Syria is openly challenged with military force.

With concern mounting amongst NATO member states, the Syrian crisis was one of the main topics on the agenda at the Halifax International Security Forum. There, Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay committed the frigate HMCS *Vancouver* to a sustained naval presence in the Mediterranean until early 2012, when it will be relieved by HMCS *Charlottetown*. Having initially been deployed to support NATO's mission in Libya, Canada's naval vessels will be used to locate, track, report and board vessels suspected of militant activity under the umbrella of NATO's Active Endeavour Operation.

This level of involvement by regional and international powers has prompted Turkey to take a lead role in opposing the Assad regime. Having handpicked the Syrian opposition with some approval of the US, and acting as host to the Free Syrian Army, Turkey has upped the stakes against Assad's weakening Alawite dynasty. With 15 of the 19 names on the leadership list being Sunni Arab Muslims (with 10 of these 15 considered Islamists) Turkey has positioned itself to become the most immediate benefactor in the event that the Assad regime collapses.

As Syria shows no sign of caving in to either domestic or foreign pressure, the potential for full scale civil war is on the rise. As the crackdown continues, Syria's troubles have major implications for: stability in Lebanon, terrorism in Israel and Turkey, the relocation of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad leadership, Kurdish security and Iranian influence in the wider region. With opposition mounting and foreign pressure rising, Syria has become a lynchpin in the escalating crisis sweeping the Arab world. Determined to crush the demonstrations with the support of his allies, Bashar al-Assad will fight to the last man to sustain his rule to avoid being the next Arab leader to fall to a popular uprising.

Further Reading: [Arab League steps up pressure on Syria](#), [Syria strife keeps Canadian navy in Mediterranean](#), [Syrian army defectors raise stakes for uprising](#), [Arab League extends Syria deadline](#)

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**The Atlantic Council of Canada + 165 University Ave., Suite 701, Toronto, ON M5H 3B8
Ph.: 416-979-1875 + F.: 416-979-0825 + Email: info@atlantic-council.ca**

