

In Focus

Transatlantic News Digest

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Georgia-NATO Radar Integration; Georgian Military Budget Build-Up

Georgia and NATO are in the final stages of integrating the ex-Soviet republic's radar defences into the Western alliance's system that is expected to be completed by late autumn. According to Georgian officials, technical work has been completed and various pieces of equipment have been purchased; now technical and legal procedures are under way in NATO for inclusion into the system. NATO agreed in 2003 to share radar information with Georgia but the country only recently completed upgrading its radar systems to match NATO specifications.

Georgia will also boost defence spending increasing the 2007 military budget by one third to \$769 million. The country has decided to amend the 2007 state budget - the fourth change this year - to boost overall spending by 450 million lari, 320 million lari of which is expected to be used for military needs. The defence ministry's budget will be boosted to 1.277 billion lari (\$769 million) from 957 million lari (\$566 million) set after previous amendment in June. Georgia's initial defence spending forecast was earlier put at 513 million lari.

This as well as the speed-up in the NATO-Georgia radar talks comes in the wake of increased tensions between this South Caucasian nation and Russia and the alleged Russian incursions, including an alleged rocket attack earlier in August. Georgia claims that Russian warplanes have twice entered its airspace and also made a missile attack, which caused no casualties. Moscow denies any involvement in the incidents.

Turkey has elected a new president

On August 28, 2007, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was elected by parliament to become the country's first head of state with a background in political Islam since the creation of the deeply secular Turkish republic in 1923. Gül, 56, who has been foreign minister for the past five years, secured 339 votes in the 550-seat parliament, which is dominated by the Islamic-rooted Justice and Development (AK) party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Secularist parties boycotted a parliamentary vote on Mr. Gül's candidacy in April, blocking his presidential bid and creating political deadlock. The ruling AK Party, which Mr. Gül helped found, decided to renominate him, arguing that a sweeping general election victory in July had given it the mandate to do so. Nevertheless, secularist opposition to Mr. Gül remained strong. The military frequently warned it would intervene to protect the secular system if required. Mr. Gül says he cut his ties to political Islam and points to more than four years as foreign minister, working for democratic reform and Turkey's EU membership. He also served as prime minister in late 2002 and early 2003.

Turkey's presidential office is regarded as the guardian of the country's secular system. Not everyone has been happy with Gül's bid for the presidency. In April, millions of people across Turkey took to the streets to protest the possibility that the country's next president could hail from the AK party. Secularists dislike the fact that Mr Gül's wife wears the Islamic headscarf. She

will be the first First Lady to wear it - even though it is unclear how this can be done inside the presidential palace, as the headscarf is banned from state institutions.

In his inaugural speech at the parliament, Gül sought to ease the concerns of secularists, insisting that he would remain neutral and abide by the founding principles of Atatürk's republic. "Secularism is a precondition for social peace as much as it is a liberating model for different lifestyles," he said. "I will embrace all our citizens without any bias."

General Ray Henault selected for Canadian Vimy Award

General Ray Henault, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, has been selected by Canada's Conference of Defense Associations Institute (CDAI) as the 2007 Vimy Award recipient for his contribution to defense and security issues. The Vimy Award is an annual event conducted by the CDA Institute since 1991 to remind Canadians of their proud heritage, by annually honouring one Canadian whose contributions to the security and preservation of democracy in this country, have embodied the spirit of Vimy Ridge.

3rd anniversary of the Beslan tragedy

It's been 3 years since a group of terrorists laid siege to a school in Beslan, a town in North Ossetia. Terrorists, a band of fighters linked to radical Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev, demanding independence for the Russian republic of Chechnya, stormed into the southern Russian school on September 1, 2004, the first day of the school year, holding more than 1,000 hostages including teachers, children, and their parents.

The siege ended two days later in a maelstrom of explosions and gunshots, but what triggered it is still hotly debated. As a result of a 2 ½ day operation to free the hostages, Russian forces stormed the building leading to a shoot-out that left some 330 people dead, 186 of them children. The world was horrified by the images of the tragedy that dominated the media for days.

The event, which came in the wake of the late August 2004 downing of two Russian airliners by Chechen suicide bombers, has been called the Russian equivalent of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. As a result, Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted Russia's right to launch [preemptive strikes](#) to prevent suspected terrorist attacks. Within days, Putin had proposed a series of [wide-ranging political reforms](#) that have shaped the path of Russia's development ever since.

New targets of global terrorists

German and Danish police thwarted separate large-scale terror plots on September 2-5, both involving nationals who were in possession of bomb-making materials.

Danish police arrested eight young Muslims in pre-dawn raids on September 2 on suspicion of plotting a bomb attack and having links with al Qaeda. According to Danish Security Intelligence Service the suspects "had acquired material ... to build explosives in connection with the preparation of a terror act." It was the first such direct al Qaeda connection discovered in Denmark. Terror experts said Denmark was a target for extremists because of its military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Muslims arrested ranged from 18 to 33 years old. They came from Afghan, Pakistani, Somali and Turkish backgrounds and six were Danish citizens. The men were arrested in Vollsmose, a mostly immigrant suburb of Odense, Denmark's third largest city.

The Scandinavian nation raised its terror preparedness level after recent attacks in London and Madrid and the global Muslim fury earlier this year over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad first published in a Danish newspaper and then reprinted in newspapers worldwide in January and February, sparking a wave of protests primarily in Islamic countries.

Three suspected Islamic terrorists from an al-Qaida-influenced group nursing "profound hatred of U.S. citizens" were arrested on suspicion of plotting imminent, massive bomb attacks on U.S. facilities in Germany.

According to German officials, the three, two of whom were German converts to Islam ages 22 and 28, and a 29 year old Turk, first came to the attention of authorities because they had been caught observing a U.S. military facility in Hanau, near Frankfurt, at the end of 2006. All three had undergone training at camps in Pakistan run by the Islamic Jihad Union, a group based in Central Asia. They had obtained some 1,500 pounds of hydrogen peroxide for making explosives.

Germany, which has forces stationed in Afghanistan, has been on high alert for attacks. The country has feared a re-emergence of militant Islamic groups since 2001, when the northern city of Hamburg was used as a base for planning the September 11 attacks.

Halifax-based ship set for Mideast deployment

The federal cabinet will soon be asked to approve the deployment of a single warship to the region in order to support the war on terror. The ship has not been identified because the formal order hasn't been given, but according to Vice-Admiral Drew Robertson, the vessel is expected to sail within a few weeks. The effort in the region is going to be ongoing for some time," said Robertson, who commanded Canada's biggest naval deployment to the region in 2001. Canada is expected to be called next year to lead the multinational naval task force in the region, which it has done in the past. Since the first Gulf War in 1991, the navy has sent ships to the region 33 times. The biggest deployment came following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Six warships and more than 1,500 sailors and aircrew joined U.S. and British warships to help hunt down al-Qaida suspects fleeing Afghanistan by sea.

Canada at the APEC Summit 2007, Sydney, Australia

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Trade and Foreign Ministers David Emerson and Maxime Bernier were in Sydney, Australia, attending the 2007 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. Emerson and Bernier met with their Pacific Rim counterparts to discuss a wide range of issues from trade, climate change and energy to APEC reform and security.

According to Bernier, Canada will have to decide soon on whether to become part of a U.S.-led nuclear partnership. Funded by the U.S., the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) proposes countries that use nuclear energy band together to promote and safeguard the industry by disposing of spent nuclear waste. Canada, along with Australia, is one of the world's largest uranium producers. Talks on the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership are scheduled to take place in Vienna later this month.

The two ministers also discussed Canada's commitment to Afghanistan, the status of the WTO Doha Round and a number of trade and investment issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Prime Minister Harper gave a speech on climate change and energy policy to a gathering of business leaders in Sydney reminding them that while stimulating economies should be a key priority, that goal must be balanced "with careful environmental stewardship." Harper has previously stated that Canada is ready to join the Asia-Pacific Partnership for Clean Development and Climate, also known as AP-6. The climate change group is seen by some as a rival to Kyoto.

Harper is also the first Canadian Prime Minister to address the Australian parliament. While under fire at home for a troop commitment to Afghanistan that cost 70 Canadian lives, Harper said he would not abandon the country. "This cause is global and necessary," he said. "Because as 9/11 showed, if we abandon our fellow human beings to lives of poverty, brutality and ignorance, in today's global village, their misery will eventually and inevitably become our own". "It's a matter of national and international security".

Canada is a founding member of APEC. According to Foreign Affairs, in 2006 nearly 85 per cent of Canada's international trade, or \$707 billion, was with APEC member economies. Four of Canada's top five trading partners — the United States, China, Japan and Mexico — are APEC members.

Authorities in Sydney implemented unprecedented security measures, including 5.5-kilometre steel-and-concrete fence to protect delegates from terrorist threats, as well as the thousands of demonstrators. Authorities have deployed up to 5,000 police and special forces troops on the streets of Sydney during the summit. This security operation is costing about \$150m.

Canada hosts NATO Conference

On September 6-9, more than 100 delegates from NATO member countries gathered in Ottawa, ON and Victoria, BC to discuss future strategy issues and develop a long-term, strategic perspective on Alliance's operations and capabilities.

The chiefs of defence from all 26 NATO countries meet three times a year - twice in Brussels and once in a host nation. These sessions are important consensus-building meetings that formulate advice to the NATO's civilian decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, was the conference's official host on behalf of the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence. Canada, an original member of the Alliance, last hosted the meeting in 1997.

Sources: AP, AFP, Reuters, www.eurasianet.org, BBC News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, ABC News, McClatchy Newspapers, CBC News, AlJazeera, CTV News, and Canadian Press reports.

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