

**In Focus Transatlantic News Digest**  
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**Editors: Elaine Kanasewich, Darya Klepchikova**  
**Email: [darya.klepchikova@atlantic-council.ca](mailto:darya.klepchikova@atlantic-council.ca)**

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**Israeli-Gaza Conflict**

In the waning days of 2008, Israel launched a military campaign against Gaza which ended its fragile six-month long truce with Hamas. Although the motives for action were justified – ending Hamas rocket attacks, its military build-up, and to reestablish Israeli deterrence – Israel’s seemingly disproportionate use of violence leads many experts to conclude that Israel will not only fail to achieve its military objectives, but will further suffer considerable backlash. Although Israel had few options outside of military action to deal with the persistent Hamas attacks, experts agree that Israel’s strategy of relying primarily on overwhelming air strikes while delaying a full-on ground invasion is already bearing the hallmarks of Israel’s failed 2006 campaign against Lebanon and Hezbollah. While the Israeli defence minister vows to take this war “...to the bitter end,” it is doubtful whether world reaction will allow Israel to continue its offensive for much longer. The high level of civilian casualties, which as of January 12 counted almost 900 Palestinians dead, has become the linchpin of sharp cries of condemnation from the Arab world. It has even prompted the International Red Cross and United Nations to openly voice their dismay concerning the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation and Israeli obstruction of their aid operations. In the meantime, officials fear that the rising Palestinian death toll will only strengthen Hamas’ resolve, boost their recruitment, and ultimately enable them to claim a “moral victory” over Israel. As incidences of anti-Semitism rise across Europe, and the opposition to Israeli action increasingly attracts leading figures from the Jewish and diplomatic community, the ability of Israel to end this two-week conflict without tarnishing both its reputation and the peace-process is becoming increasingly difficult.

**[Live links to articles: Who will save Israel from itself, ‘War to bitter end’, Can Israel Survive its Assault on Gaza?, Israel’s attack on Gaza Europe fears spike in anti-Semitism, Europe takes to the streets, Going all the way, Invasion offers benefits but also risks to both sides, Israel divided over its next move in Gaza, Israel’s bombing strikes on Gaza: What are the motives?, Israel’s weeklong turning point, Leading British Jews call on Israel to halt ‘horror’ of Gaza, Military victory impossible in Gaza: Janes Intelligence, Israel’s Gaza Gamble, Preventing a ‘divine victory’, Israel failing to achieve goals in Gaza, British newspapers believe Gaza bombings will fail, Echo of war in Lebanon](#)**

**Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute**

The European Union is facing its first challenge of 2009 after a dispute over the price of natural gas and outstanding debt led Russian gas giant, Gazprom, to cut its supplies to

Ukraine beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. With nearly 80% of Europe's gas supplies coming via Ukraine's pipelines, the move has subsequently disrupted the supply of gas to a number of EU Member States. Leading EU officials, faced with the prospects of Member States seeing their gas supplies fall to dangerously low levels, have issued stern calls for a swift resolution to the dispute. However, there is doubt whether the EU has the clout, let alone the resolve, to move beyond simply issuing strongly worded statements and take tangible actions to restore gas supplies before the expected deep freeze hits Europe. The Czech Presidency of the EU was at first reluctant to act, calling the situation a private bilateral trade dispute. Although it is now threatening to call an emergency summit on the issue, the fact that many EU states have separate bilateral energy deals with Russia, thus hindering a unified EU energy policy, leaves the Czech Presidency with little "stick" to back its words with. The dispute has largely affected Eastern EU members, notably Bulgaria and Romania, and has already led to significant economic losses as several countries, including France and Italy, were forced to impose restrictions on gas consuming industries. Other countries that can no longer count on their gas stocks to meet their demands have begun searching for alternative sources of energy. The situation is believed to have been provoked by a combination of falling global oil prices and a history of political disputes between Russia and Ukraine. The political rivalries playing out between Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko are further hindering a rapid resolution of the crisis.

**[Live links to articles: Alarmed, EU Threatens Gas Summit With Russia, Ukraine, EU Forced To Tread Softly Around Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute, Putin Orders Cuts in Gas Shipped Through Ukraine, Gazprom Says Ukraine Refused to Pump Extra 15 mln cu m to Europe, Russian Gas Flow Halted through Ukraine to Europe, Europe Gas Stocks Tested by Russia Crisis, Ukraine Has Stolen 86 mln cu m of gas in 2009 – Gazprom, Russia-Ukraine Price Dispute Driven by Political Hydra, Dispute Hits Europe Gas Supplies, Gas Cut: How Europe Is Coping, EU Calls for Immediate Solution as Supplies of Russian Gas Are Cut, Ukraine Refuses to Ship Russian Gas to Europe.](#)**

## **Recommended Readings**

### **Obama's worst Pakistan nightmare**

International Herald Tribune, January 9, 2009

One of the first tests to the Presidency of Barack Obama may well come out of Pakistan, a nuclear armed country whose government exists in an uneasy power-sharing state while simultaneously holding the record as the world's greatest nuclear proliferator. Although the country's top general assures American officials that its nuclear weapons are secure, the fear that rogue scientists or Inter-Service Intelligence agents with militant Islamic sympathies can divert nuclear secrets, components or whole weapons, is a danger that has plagued America ever since Pakistan became a nuclear weapons state. Although past US administrations have attempted to help Pakistan secure its weapons, a suspicious Pakistan refuses to allow enough American access to ensure complete reliability. As a result, the threat of Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into the hands of any one of the radical militant elements seeking to topple the government will remain a persistent "nightmare" Obama will have to grapple with from day one. *Read the full article [here](#).*

### **US, India in early talks over missile defence: FT**

Dawn.com, January 8, 2009

American officials have confirmed that India and the US have held preliminary talks on plans for the US to sell a missile shield system to India. The talks have so far been at a technical and scientific level but were aimed at discussing methods to protect India from nuclear threats. The talks come in the wake of a growing US-India strategic partnership which was kick-started in October 2008 with the signing of the US-India civil nuclear cooperation accord. Pakistan, India's next-door nuclear rival, has already voiced its concern, saying it may be forced to take its own counter-measures to the planned defensive system in India. *Read the full article [here](#).*

### **North Korea announces March elections**

BBC News Online, January 2, 2009

North Korea will hold its first election in six years on March 8, 2009. North Koreans will go to the polls to cast a vote for a pre-selected candidate to represent the 12<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly. Experts speculate that these elections, coming in the wake of the Kim Jung-Il's health scare, reflect the realization that the country has no plans for a successor. There is further speculation that the elections are an attempt to "shake up" North Korea's leadership, moving it away from the iron-grip of the military and instituting a "generational-change" which could better handle the dire economic situation of the isolated country. *Read the full article [here](#).*

### **Bin Laden Challenges Obama in New Audio Message**

ABC News, January 14, 2009

A new audio message released by Osama bin Laden has not only ended speculations that he was dead, but also posed a direct challenge to the incoming administration of Barack Obama. Although officials are dismissing the tape as an attempt by bin Laden to remain relevant, the tape directly questions whether Obama will be capable of living up to his pledge to capture bin Laden and win the war in Afghanistan. Bin Laden further makes reference to the current US economic crisis, claiming that this will further weaken the US and their global status. *Read the full article [here](#).*

### **Clinton Vows to Pursue Engagement with Iran**

Global Security Newswire, Jan. 14, 2009

Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton claimed that new diplomatic efforts in persuading Iran to halt potential nuclear-related activities would be an essential issue on the incoming administration's agenda. According to her, the aim is to find "a positive, effective way of engaging with Iran", and it was also suggested that Obama might meet with Iranian leaders if it can advance the US interests. At the same time, better coalitions with countries having a big stake in preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon power must be created, entailing strengthening or extending nuclear weapons control agreements.

Among other things, Clinton stated their intentions to seek agreements with Russia on further reductions in weapons under START, as well as their commitment to end the North Korean nuclear program. *Read the full article [here](#).*

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**Sources:** International Herald Tribune, The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, Time, The Toronto Star, The Guardian, CBC News, RIA Novosti, The Washington Post, Ynetnews, Spiegel Online, Dawn.com, BBC News, Al Jazeera English, globalsecurity.org,

Reuters, Rian.ru, echo.msk.ru, Defense News, Global Security Newswire, World Politics Review.

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