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Reflecting on Russia's Diplomatic Relations with the West

On November 9th the world watched as Germany celebrated 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Speaking at an official celebration in Berlin, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown highlighted the significance of this event: "The wall that had imprisoned half a city, half a country, half a continent, half a world for nearly a third of a century was swept away by the greatest force of all – the unbreakable spirit of the men and women...who knew that while force has the temporary power to dictate, it can never ultimately decide." This statement is indicative of a dominant Western perspective which sees the fall of the Berlin Wall as an event which, more than simply marking the collapse of the Soviet Union, signifies the triumph of Western ideas – namely democracy and capitalism – over Communist state planning and oppressive totalitarianism. However, despite the significance of this 20 year milestone, it can be said that the Cold War's legacy continues to live on. Offering a discordant view of this anniversary, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed concern that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc had failed to encourage Russian integration into a common European space, and had perpetuated NATO encroachment on Russia's Western flank. According to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, the collapse of the USSR under Gorbachev's policies was "the greatest geostrategic catastrophe of the last century." In consideration of these perspectives, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall provided an opportunity to reflect on how the world has changed since the Cold War, and the challenges to Russia's relations with the West moving forward.

The fall of the Iron Curtain saw a relatively peaceful resolution to a conflict which had divided the world and brought two super powers to the brink of full blown nuclear warfare. Further, the end of the Cold War was followed by a wave of democracy in a number of former Soviet states thereby encouraging the growth of freedom and respect for human rights. While it is clear that there has been great improvement since the days of the Cold War, Russia's diplomatic relations with the West continue to have their ups and downs. For instance, in regards to Russia's bilateral relations with the United Kingdom, progress towards a genuine strategic partnership has been hampered by events such as the ongoing murder trial of former KGB agent and British citizen Alexander Litvinenk, and Russia's military response to the 2008 Georgian conflict. Russia's relations with the United States face similar challenges as exemplified by recent complications in negotiations for the renewal of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, set to expire December 5th. However, the most notable legacy of the Cold War era has been the continued – although relatively benign – tension between Russia and

NATO. Since 1989, 12 former Soviet states have joined NATO thus minimizing Russia's influence on Eastern Europe while creating new divides between Russia and Europe. Russian leaders have argued that the end of the Warsaw Pact should have led to the disbanding of NATO or, at very least, a decision not to absorb former Soviet states into this security arrangement. Instead, in the words of Medvedev "NATO is still a bloc whose rockets are targeting Russian territory."

Consistent with Russia's post-Cold War security angsts, President Medvedev on Sunday unveiled the much-vaunted draft European Security Treaty. This draft would create an umbrella agreement to be signed by governments from "Vancouver to Vladivostok" as well as multilateral organizations such as NATO and the EU. It would include a NATO style collective security clause and would enable members to call mandatory summits when they feel that their security interests are under threat. Medvedev argues that a European Security Treaty would finally end Cold War mentalities by replacing security institutions that are ill suited to defuse conflict in a multi-polar world. In recent years Russian leaders have protested against decisions to increase U.S. and NATO military forces in Eastern Europe – such as the now-scrapped plan to build a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic – and have argued that due in part to existing security architecture, the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict had the potential of escalating into a large-scale conflict. Initial reactions to this draft document have been lukewarm at best. Some western diplomats have argued that such a treaty would only serve to undermine NATO capabilities by giving Russia leverage to block NATO operations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Reflecting on this reluctance, Russia's envoy to NATO has expressed frustration at the military alliances unwillingness to discuss Moscow's proposal. Some analysts have voiced concern that failing to constructively engage Russia on this proposal will undermine the potential of increased Russian cooperation on the ISAF mission. Others refute such speculation by arguing that dismissing this proposal will have little impact on Russia's future relations with NATO. At very least, it could be said that at a time when world leaders such as Barack Obama and Gordon Brown have stressed the importance of "re-setting" diplomatic relations with Russia, the draft European Security Treaty opens an interesting chapter in Russia's dynamic relations with the Western World.

Full articles: [Britain and Russia must be Partners](#), [Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine create a joint military brigade](#), [European Security Treaty to 'end Cold War legacy'](#); [Medvedev, Russia, U.S. Likely to Miss Deadline on Arms Pact](#), [America, NATO and Eastern Europe: Disquit on the Eastern Front](#), [Poland Concerned About Russian Military Exercises](#), [Russia warns NATO over Afghan Cooperation](#), [U.S. Hopes to Clinch Draft of START deal by end of December](#), [Moscow Posts Draft of European Treaty](#), [Tearing Down the Wall's Nuclear Legacy](#), [Germany Celebrates 20th Anniversary of the Collapse of the Berlin Wall](#), [The Legacy of 1989 is still of for Debate](#).

Barack Obama Announces Troop Increases: Who will Join the Surge?

On Tuesday President Barack Obama ended weeks of speculation by announcing that the United States will commit an additional 30,000 troops to its efforts in Afghanistan. This move prompted NATO to announce an increase of 5,000 non-U.S. troops to its 42,000 strong contingency in Afghanistan. While NATO allies such as British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Australia's Kevin Rudd and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have all expressed their backing of Obama's plan, none have detailed any individual pledges for troop increases. A significant question thus remains; who will stay to fight along with the U.S.?

The British government, which itself is facing ever growing public opposition to the war is perhaps the most anxious about the US decision. After losing five soldiers in an attack by a rogue Afghan police officer, and polls showing 64% of the British population see the war as unwinnable, Prime Minister Gordon Brown's own political life hangs in the balance. Despite the growing disenchantment among the British population, a proud military heritage and a duty to their US ally would likely see Brown re-commit his country to the war should Obama raise his country's commitment. Canada's defence department has confirmed that the chief of defence, General Walter Natynczyk, has ordered that preparations begin for Canada's planned 2011 Canadian Forces pull-out. Experts still believe Barack Obama will ask Canada to stay past 2011, a possibility Defence Minister Peter Mackay has already ruled out despite refusing to dispel the possibility that some Canadian Forces will stay in Afghanistan past 2011 in a reconstruction support capacity. Meanwhile, another ally, Australia, is struggling to meet its own troop level commitment when it was revealed that, despite claiming to have roughly 1550 troops in Afghanistan, the real number is likely 30 percent lower than that. This could have serious repercussions if the Australians are asked to take over operations in the volatile south from the departing 1800 strong Dutch forces.

Barack Obama's decision comes despite criticism from both the Republican Party as well as those in his own administration. The latest critique came from the current US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl W. Eikenberry, who voiced his opposition to any decision to significantly increase the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. In light of such opposition, Obama's decision to support a troop surge was balanced by a commitment to begin withdrawing troops next July, thereby signaling an eventual end to American operations in Afghanistan. In support of this position, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated that the U.S. objective remains clear; eliminate the threat of Al Qaeda. But many argue that no level of troop increase will benefit the situation in Afghanistan as long as there is no reliable partner in the Afghan government. Although Hamid Karzai has secured the Afghan Presidency, it is unclear as to whether he is committed to ending the corruption which taints his reign, leaving many to worry that the U.S. will be left nation-building on its own. With such concern in mind, it is important to take stock of the positive developments where they can be found. The Afghan police force, under the leadership of Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar, is demanding tougher standards in training and anti-corruption. A bill to increase police pay and benefits also helps while success in the model whereby Afghan police learn through partnership with NATO troops can prove successful in training the Afghan army. Another positive development was recently articulated by Afghanistan's Ambassador to Canada, Jawed Ludin, who was encouraged by the greater feeling of protection among Afghans, which is crucial to convince them to move forward with their lives. These are just a few positive signs which many argue should be heeded in this difficult time. But when Canada's first "clown" in space, Cirque de Soleil founder Guy Laliberté garners 23 times more media attention than Canada's current combat mission in Afghanistan, it may be easier to understand why all the facts concerning Afghanistan may not be fully appreciated.

Full articles: [Afghan election still a success: ambassador](#), [Gordon Brown: we will never accept calls to appease the Taliban](#), [Michael O'Hanlon – a blue line in Afghanistan](#), [PM bid to bolster Afghan support](#), [Five British soldier shot dead](#), [Brown Vows to Finish Afghan Fight](#), [Preparations begin for 2011 Afghanistan pullout](#), [Diggers' Afghan strength disputed](#), [Gates Says Afghan Plan will Mix Various Proposals](#), [Guy Laliberte gets more press than Afghan mission](#), [News Analysis: In Leaning on Karzai, US Has Limited Leverage](#), [Public opinion on Afghanistan: hearts and minds](#), [Hollow Threats: Why America is Stuck with Karzai](#), [U.S. Envoy Urges Caution on Forces for Afghanistan](#), [US has no long-term stakes in Afghanistan: Clinton](#), [U.S. Afghan Plan Spurs NATO Troop Pledge, Warnings](#).

Recommended Readings

EU Mission to Train Afghan Police in Disarray

International Herald Tribune, November 17, 2009

The EU has admitted that it has dropped the ball when it comes to staffing and funding a crucial training program designed to train Afghan Police officers. To put it into perspective, by 2010, the United States would have contributed \$10B to train Afghan's to become competent police officers. Meanwhile, the E.U. mission, intended to be 400 people strong has an operating budget of only \$95M. E.U. Officials admit that the 27-country block has failed on its mission to provide enough trainers and personnel, as well as coordinate with NATO-led training operations. The EU Political Chief and the rotating Swedish EU President vowed to fix the situation in order to re-establish EU credibility with Afghanistan. Yet, low salaries and poor guidelines still need to be addressed. Even more critical, however, is the issue of security. Currently, NATO members Greece and Turkey are blocking a security accord which would enable NATO to provide the EU trainers with protection. Without security for the trainers, no lessons on security can be taught.

Read the full article [here](#)

New Jihad Code Threatens al Qaeda

November 10, 2009

CNN

It appears that a blow has been dealt to al Qaeda's global terrorist network by a rather unlikely source: the Libyan Islamic Fighting Force (LIFG). After nearly two years of secret talks with Libyan security officials, leaders of the LIFG have written what has been described as a new code for jihad. In exchange for the release of imprisoned LIFG leaders, this document entitled "Corrective Studies" renounces the violent tactics previously used by the LIFG against the Gadhafi regime, stating that such action is illegal under Islamic law. In so doing, this document calls into question the use of terrorism by al Qaeda: "Jihad has ethics and morals because it is for God. That means it is forbidden to kill women, children, elderly people, priests, messengers, traders and the like." While it is stated that jihad is permissible when Muslim land is invaded – such is the case in Afghanistan and Iraq – this document insists that the doctrine of Islamic Jihad does not permit the use of violence against civilians.

In the early 1990s members of the LIFG fought in Afghanistan along side Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders and, despite past differences in opinions between bin Laden and LIFG leaders, the LIFG is one of the worlds most respected jihadist organizations. This ideological challenge is of critical importance not only in light of al Qaeda's growing influence in Libya, but also because of the large number of Libyan nationals fighting against western troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. Given the LIFG's credibility in the Muslim world and the fact that a number of prominent religious scholars have already supported this recently circulated document, it is hoped that the Corrective Studies will help staunch al Qaeda recruitment by undermine the legitimacy terrorism through jihad.

Read the full article [here](#)

Sources: American Free Press, BBC, Bloomberg, Calgary Herald, Canadian Press, CNN, CTV, France 24, International Herald Tribune, CBC, Economist, New York Times, Ottawa Citizen, Reuters, Spiegel International Online, Telegraph, The Australian, The Economist, The Globe and Mail, The Guardian, The Moscow Times, The Toronto Star, The Washington Post, Time, Wall Street Journal.

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