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Ban on Cluster Bombs

Over 100 countries have agreed, on May 30, to ban the use of cluster bombs at a conference in Dublin, after almost two weeks of negotiations. The accord prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of the weapons, which spread over a large area when dropped from aircraft and are supposed to explode on impact. Many of the bombs do not detonate and remain dangerous, injuring and killing civilians after the conflict has ended. Children are frequently the victims because the bombs look like toys. The treaty is scheduled to be signed on December 3 in Oslo.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), cluster munitions are canisters packed with as many as 650 small bombs that can cover an area of several thousand square meters. ICRC called for a ban on the use of cluster bombs in populated areas in 2000 after the conflict in the then Serbian province of Kosovo. The weapons were used in Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998, Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, in Israeli attack against Lebanon in 2006, the most recent large-scale usage of cluster bombs, (where, according to the UN and ICRC estimates, Israel dropped 4 million bomblets, 1 million of which may not have exploded), and by Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh where, as of February 2008, 7812 cluster bombs were found and disposed by HALO Trust, a UK-registered charity specializing in the removal of landmines and unexploded ordnance in countries from the Balkans to Central Asia.

The accord was reached despite intense opposition from a number of countries including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and the United States, the world's top user of the weapon. U.S. officials say the global ban on cluster bombs could jeopardize U.S. participation in joint peacekeeping and disaster relief operations around the world but the State Department spokesman Tom Casey said the treaty would not change U.S. policy and cluster munitions remain "absolutely critical and essential" to U.S. military operations.

Lt. Gen. Yevgeny Buzhinsky of the Russian Defense Ministry said, "Russia will not ban cluster bombs and land mines. We stand for evolutionary development of these weapons. Russia's Defense Ministry objects to radical and prohibitive measures of this kind."

Supporters of the treaty who long have sought a ban insisted they had made it too politically painful for any country to use the weapons again.

According to arms control experts from Human Rights Watch, despite the intense pressure exerted by Washington, the final agreement is "very strong." "We're certain that nations

thinking of using cluster munitions won't want to face the international condemnation that will rain down upon them, because the weapons have been stigmatized now," said Steve Goose, director of the Arms Control Department at Human Rights Watch, who was involved in the talks. Goose said this decision would be up to individual U.S. allies. The treaty requires nations that ratify it to eliminate all cluster weapons within their "jurisdiction or control." According to him, most NATO members were likely to conclude that U.S. bases were operating under their jurisdiction and order U.S. cluster munitions to be removed or destroyed, while Germany and Japan were most likely to permit the weapons stocks to remain.

The talks in Dublin are part of the Oslo process, launched by Norway several years ago to prepare a treaty on an international ban of cluster weapons. It is a series of conferences aimed at producing an international ban on cluster bombs. This process was prompted by the failure of states parties to the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) to agree to begin negotiations on cluster munitions. A similar initiative by Canada in 1997 led to the so-called Ottawa Convention or the Mine Ban Treaty, formally the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, which bans completely all anti-personnel landmines. As of 2007, it has been signed by 158 countries. Thirty-seven states, including China, India, Russia and the U.S., are not party to the Convention.

NATO's Interests in Turkmenistan

In mid-May NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons was in Turkmenistan to discuss with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov the country's cooperation with NATO within the Partnership for Peace program (PfP). They also discussed issues related to energy security including preventing a possible crisis in natural gas supplies as well as eliminating their consequences. "NATO is going to continue building up its relations with Turkmenistan with respect and taking due account of its neutral status," Simmons told at the meeting with the Turkmen President.

Turkmenistan adheres to a policy of constant neutrality and does not offer any armed forces units or infrastructure for use in the context of NATO-led operations. This is why it was a surprise when President Berdimuhamedov announced he would attend the NATO summit in Romania in early April. Several high-ranking NATO, U.S., and EU officials have been making trips to Turkmenistan for more than half a year now, but most reports pointed to talks focusing on potential Turkmen natural-gas exports to Europe.

Not so long ago, under its former president Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan was a country that was kept away from participating in any international groupings including those with a purely economic agenda. Though Turkmenistan is an unofficial observer of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), it has routinely attended almost all of the organization's meetings, since most of Turkmenistan's economic partners and regional countries are in the SCO.

Since Niyazov's death in 2006, there has been a large battle among five players - the United States, Europe, Russia, China and Iran - over who will dominate Turkmenistan's wealth of energy supplies. Though each player has made small deals, none has really solidified an alliance with Ashgabat or President Berdimuhamedov, who, after Niyazov's death, embarked on a more dynamic and open foreign policy. This former Soviet republic that is rich in natural gas and is still much dependent on Russia's pipelines also shares a border with Afghanistan and this is where NATO comes into play.

Turkmenistan was the first country in Central Asia to join the PfP program in 1994. Ashgabat's relationship with NATO has been very unstable though. Under Niyazov it was a partnership in name only. Niyazov only signed the agreement with NATO to try to control the "Mary Clan", the most powerful clan in Turkmenistan and the group that controls drug trafficking in the country.

Niyazov was also a supporter of the 2001 war in Afghanistan, though that support stemmed from his fear that Afghanistan's instability would spill over into the country. In addition, there was a wave of "color" revolutions that began in Serbia in 2000, swept Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, and finally reached the Central Asian countries Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 2005. Not only was the Turkmenbashi (*Niyazov's title meaning Leader of Turkmens, referred to his position as the founder and president of the Association of Turkmens of the World*) terrified that the West - which was accused of sparking the revolutions - would attempt one in his country, but he knew that his country would be more vulnerable to such a revolution because it had a far more fragile power structure and weaker security services than the other countries.

In security and military matters, Berdimuhamedov had been pushing his country toward Moscow. At the last SCO meeting, Berdimuhamedov discussed the possibility of becoming a recognized observer or even a member. Also, the leader has made a military upgrade one of his country's top priorities. Turkmenistan currently has unused military bases left over from the Soviet era, and because Turkmenistan is next to Iran and Afghanistan, Moscow and Washington are fighting over those bases and their use.

Allowing NATO and its allies the use of military bases would be a bold move for Turkmenistan, which risks the anger of Russia and southern neighbor Iran in forging closer ties with the Western alliance. Ashgabat wants more than either side is currently offering and recently asked Moscow to help it carry out a military upgrade, primarily for its air force.

Another major obstacle to new Turkmen-NATO relationship is Turkmenistan's extremely poor human rights record. Berdimuhamedov has been much slower to implement domestic reforms than he has been at changing foreign policy. He has restored some of the rights Niyazov took away, but the new Turkmen president has stopped short of introducing any real democratic reforms. Western human rights organizations have been pressing the Turkmen government to make democratic changes and, with Western troops using Turkmen military facilities, rights groups can be expected to call on NATO to pressure Turkmenistan on the issue.

Countries Call For Security Belt Around Afghanistan

China, India and Russia called recently for the creation of a security belt around Afghanistan to halt the spread of heroin. At a meeting in Yekaterinburg, the foreign ministers of the three countries discussed the situation around Afghanistan, where the drug threat emanates, and they think that the security belt would help to build a drug-secure area around Afghanistan.

Talking with his Indian and Chinese counterparts, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told, "We support efforts of the international community to seek stabilization in that country and believe that in addition to efforts already made, it would be useful to take measures to create the anti-drug security belts around Afghanistan with participation of all interested parties and with the coordinating role of the United Nations."

Neither Russia nor India has a border with Afghanistan; and China's border is only 76 kilometers. Afghanistan's other neighbors are Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan.

Afghanistan is one of the world's major opium producers and supplies Western markets. One of the main drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan lies across sparsely populated post-Soviet Central Asia to Russia. From there Afghan drugs make their way to Europe.

Russia says it suffers not least because thousands of people die from AIDS-related illnesses each year after becoming infected with HIV through using dirty needles to pump Afghan-sourced heroin into their veins.

Officials in Afghanistan's neighboring countries regularly announce large-scale busts of narcotics once the illegal convoys cross the border. Drug police in Tajikistan said recently they intercepted the biggest haul of opium and heroin in their history estimating it to carry a Western European street value of around US\$10 million.

According to UN data, Afghanistan accounts for 93 percent of world opium output. Around 90 percent of the global supply of heroin emanates in Afghanistan, with output increasing since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001.

Recommended Reading

Why NATO Troops Can't Deliver Peace in Afghanistan

By Ullrich Fichtner, Spiegel International

Forty nations are embroiled in an unwinnable war in Afghanistan. Anyone who travels through the country with Western troops soon realizes that NATO forces would have to be increased tenfold for peace to be even a remote possibility. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Pipeline Politics: Iran Looks to Send Natural Gas East

By Peter Kiernan, World Politics Review Exclusive

Earlier this month, Royal Dutch Shell and Spain's Repsol pulled out of a proposed Iranian natural gas development project that was estimated to be worth over \$10 billion. The decision by the two European energy firms to pull out of phase 13 of the South Pars project was seen as a setback for Iran's efforts to court foreign interest in its energy sector at a time when the Bush administration is actively trying to discourage it. *Read the full article [here](#).*

How to Solve the Greek Dispute over Macedonia's Name

By Edward P. Joseph, Spiegel International

The 17-year conflict over Macedonia's official state name has taken a new turn. Greece's successful effort to block Skopje's entry into NATO has fueled nationalist dynamics in both countries. But there is more at stake here than a name: Macedonia's stability - and Kosovo's - rests on urgently finding a reasonable compromise with Greece. *Read the full article [here](#).*

The List: The Worst Places to Be a Terrorist

Foreign Policy Magazine Web Exclusive

Fighting transnational terrorism often involves making unsavory choices between protecting civil rights and providing security. The following regimes have opted for the latter and are definitely not the kind of places you want to get caught if you're plotting some terrorist mayhem. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Sources: Associated Press, Reuters, Xinhua, CNN, Bloomberg News, Inter Press Service, Al Jazeera, RIA Novost, Interfax, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Stratfor, Washington Post, www.euronews.net, www.karabakh-open.com, <http://www.clusterbombs.org.uk>.

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