

## **In Focus Transatlantic News Digest**

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### **Anti-Piracy Fight in Somalia**

Another ship was seized by Somali pirates on Saturday, November 15, this time a Saudi-owned oil tanker *Sirius Star*. According to U.S. Navy spokesman, Lieutenant Nathan Christensen, “this is unprecedented. It’s the largest that we’ve seen pirated”. The *Sirius Star* holds approximately two million barrels of oil, and has a crew of 25, including citizens of Croatia, Great Britain, the Philippines, Poland and Saudi Arabia.

This hijacking was among the most brazen this year by ransom-driven Somali pirates. They have seized at least six ships off the Horn of Africa in the past week, but the hijacking of a supertanker marks a dramatic escalation. Christensen also pointed out that the ship was hijacked about 450 nautical miles off the coast of Kenya, which is the farthest out to sea Somali pirates have ever struck and demonstrates the increasing boldness of their attacks. Compared to previous years, attacks off the Somali coast have increased more than 75 percent, making the waters in the area some of the most dangerous in the world.

Momentum has been growing for coordinated international action after the September 25 hijacking of the Ukrainian ship MV *Faina*, carrying tanks and other heavy weaponry. The *Sirius Star* case will certainly add to pressure for joint action to tackle the threat to one of the world’s busiest shipping routes. Somalia's interim government is fighting a strengthening Islamist insurgency, and does not have forces to patrol its territorial waters, which makes international presence in the area indispensable.

At the end of October, 2008, three NATO ships responded to the UN Secretary General’s request for NATO escort to merchant ships carrying World Food Programme (WFP) cargo. Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) currently comprises ships from Germany, Greece, Italy, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States and is taking on the anti-piracy role off the coast of Somalia. The Alliance continues coordinating its assistance with the WFP, the European Union and the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom who are all involved in this humanitarian and security effort.

In addition, warships from more than a dozen nations, including several European countries, Russia, India and South Korea, have focused their anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, increasing their military presence in recent months. But Saturday's hijacking occurred much farther south, highlighting weaknesses in the international response and demonstrating that their anti-piracy efforts are not enough.

Among the newest developments in anti-piracy fight, an Indian frigate battled a pirate ship in the Gulf of Aden on Tuesday, November 18, leaving the pirate ship ablaze and likely sunk, the country's defense ministry reported.

Two days later, Russian Navy chief, Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky, announced that they will send additional ships to the Horn of Africa in an effort to crack down on the recent wave of hijackings by Somalia-based pirates. Earlier he claimed that Russian ships would be operating there on their own, but it is known that the crews of the *Neustrashimy* and the British frigate HMS *Cumberland* teamed up to chase off pirates who attacked a Danish ship in the gulf earlier this month.

More than 90 ships have been attacked off eastern Africa so far this year, according to the International Maritime Bureau which monitors piracy (Nov.20, 2008). The Somali pirates still hold 17 vessels, including the Saudi-owned supertanker *Sirius Star* and the Ukrainian cargo vessel *Faina*.

**Live links to articles:** [NATO Naval Task Group en Route to Escort Duties off Somali Coast](#), [Standing NATO Maritime Group Transits Suez Canal en Route to Anti-Piracy Duties](#), [More Vessels Seized Near Somalia](#), [Somali Pirates Seize Supertanker Loaded with Crude](#), [Pirates Hijack Oil Supertanker off East Africa](#), [Pirates Hijack Saudi Tanker off Kenyan Coast](#), [NATO Shipping Centre Ramps up Reporting Scheme to Counter Piracy in the Gulf of Aden](#), [Russia Sending More Ships in Pirate Crack Down](#).

### **Ukrainian NATO Aspirations**

Ukraine's relationship with NATO dates back to 1994 when it started its involvement in Partnership for Peace activities. Three years later, it signed a "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership", and in 2002, Ukraine officially declared its intention to join NATO.

Despite an ongoing dialogue between the Ukrainian government and NATO, the Alliance retained its negative association for the average Ukrainian. Some explain it by the fact that an advertising campaign in favor of NATO has not been very noticeable or effective. In 2008, public opinion on the subject of joining the Alliance remains basically unchanged from what it had been in 2002, as demonstrated by a poll conducted by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology in September of 2008. Only 17.4 percent of respondents agreed that joining NATO was the best military security option for Ukraine. According to Germany's Minister of State Gernot Erler, the very fact that the majority of the population doesn't support the Alliance can be a reason for refusing Ukraine's admittance.

Nonetheless, Ukraine requested a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Bucharest summit in April of 2008. It was not granted back then, but a promise to review this decision in December of this year left Ukrainian officials satisfied. After the Russia-

Georgia conflict, however, the prospects of joining the Alliance for Ukraine have been “considerably weakened” (Yulia Tymoshenko, the Prime Minister of Ukraine). Ukraine’s domestic political turmoil also played a major role in reducing probability of its acceptance into the Alliance. Starting with the breakup of the ruling coalition over the war in Georgia, the political scene in Ukraine continued to degenerate even further in October, resulting in parliament dissolution and a call from President Victor Yushchenko for early elections. These events heightened already existing concerns among Western European leaders about the country’s overall readiness and stability and gave them another reason for rejecting Ukraine’s MAP request.

A major argument being made against the Ukrainian case is that Russia should not be provoked so soon after the Georgian conflict, while the West still does not have a clear strategy of dealing with it. Some European officials fear that Ukraine could be the next target for Russian interference because of the tensions over Russia’s Black Sea fleet based in Crimea, as well as its large Russian-speaking population. That is why it is argued that allying with Ukraine will just create defense liabilities for NATO members requiring more spending and troops to defend the long Ukrainian border. They believe that Ukraine will offer little to the Alliance; instead, it comes with a potential territorial conflict with a stronger neighbor, making the benefits of expanding NATO to Ukraine uncertain.

According to Ukraine experts, the likelihood of a MAP invitation in December is virtually nil now (Andrew Wilson). Anatoliy Hrytsenko, the ex-Defense Minister of Ukraine, claims that Ukraine should recall its application for joining NATO MAP altogether and instead, pay more attention to developing cooperation with NATO and solving frozen regional conflicts since “it is better to consider issues of national security, which are pressing after the Caucasus conflict”.

Potential problems notwithstanding, most experts agree that it is crucial to continue an ongoing dialogue between Ukraine and NATO and not to curtail any of their joint activities as has been the case with Russia. Fortunately, both sides see the importance of cooperation: on November 17, a meeting of Ukraine-NATO Commission was held in Brussels, attended by ambassadors and Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Vladimir Ogrizko. It focused on the preparation for the December meeting of foreign ministers of NATO member states that will assess Kyiv’s progress in regard to its appeal for NATO MAP. Besides, on 12-13 November 2008, the Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, chaired the sixth Informal High-Level NATO-Ukraine Consultations. At the conference, senior officials from Ukraine and NATO countries discussed the current security environment, as well as Ukraine’s capabilities to contribute to NATO-led operations and meet existing security challenges.

To conclude, it is important to mention another new development in Ukraine-NATO cooperation. During the 54th General Assembly (GA) of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) in Berlin on November 8-12, it was finally decided to award hosting of the next GA to Ukraine, in Kyiv. This will provide an excellent opportunity to draw international attention to Ukraine, as well as for exposure in the Ukrainian media of NATO related issues and educating the Ukrainian public about possibilities and advantages of NATO-Ukraine cooperation.

**Live links to articles:** [Ukraine's NATO Hopes Dashed](#), [Ukraine and Georgia not Ready for NATO](#), [Ukraine's NATO Prospects "considerably weakened"](#), [Ukraine Should Recall its Application for NATO MAP](#), [Don't Expand NATO: The Case Against Membership for Georgia and Ukraine](#), [Brussels to Host Meeting of Ukraine-NATO Commission](#), [Secretary General Chairs High-Level NATO-Ukraine Consultations](#).

## **US-Russia Military Talks**

At an isolated manor just outside of Helsinki, Finland, the neutral country still resonating with its legacy of cold-war-era talks, a high-level military meeting between Russian and U.S. top officers was held. On October 21, for the first time after the Russia-Georgia war, Adm. Michael G. Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his Russian counterpart Gen. Nikolai Makarov met to discuss salient defense issues.

Since the Russia-Georgia conflict broke out, the relations between Russia and the U.S., already strenuous, have become particularly tense. According to the U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the Pentagon will review all aspects of its relationship with Moscow since Russia must face some consequences of its aggressive behavior. Already, a deal on civil nuclear cooperation with Russia was curtailed. In addition, the U.S. provided Georgia with hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid, as well as extensive training for its armed forces from U.S. instructors.

Russia, in its turn, still perceives Georgia as part of its historical influence and is not looking forward to the prospect of another former Soviet republic joining NATO. That is why it was particularly irritated by the U.S. involvement in the conflict with Georgia over the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In response, Russia halted military cooperation with NATO later in August, accusing the West of "double standards" over the Georgia-Russia war.

In light of the two countries' mutual discontent with each other's actions in August 2008, this meeting was a very important step in U.S.-Russia relations as it laid a foundation for an ongoing dialogue on some very controversial military issues. According to Mullen, it turned out to be a "productive, businesslike conversation", and the tone of the meeting was described by a spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Finland, Kim Hargan, as "cordial, but candid."

Among the issues discussed were NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, Black Sea operations and the current status of missile defense systems in Europe. Makarov mentioned that the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was on the agenda as well, but the decision on resuming the forum will be made in November or December and "this question remains on the American's court." Even though it was undoubtedly a major step forward, it is impossible for U.S.-Russia military relations to go "immediately back to where they were before the invasion" (Mullen), since the events in Georgia changed the already fragile balance between the two countries.

One of Russia's concerns that was also brought up at the meeting is the U.S. plans to base elements of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic. Moscow fears that it may be used either to spy on its military or reduce its nuclear deterrent. It also believes that by doing so, the United States is actually paving the way to a new arms race. The U.S. officials, however, deny all the suppositions linked to Russia and

affirm that the shield is needed to protect against possible missile attacks from Iran. Nonetheless, Makarov did not seem to be convinced and asserted after the meeting that Russia “would need to take measures in connection with the deployment of missile defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland.”

Because of the concern expressed by some newer NATO members about their territorial integrity, Mullin considered it necessary to re-affirm the Alliance’s mutual-security guarantees by visiting the Baltic republic of Lithuania. His goal was to send “a very visible message of reassurance” (Mullin) to NATO allies at the Russian border.

The date for the next similar meeting was not determined, but according to Makarov, they agreed to discuss military matters “periodically” by phone “and if necessary, in face-to-face talks.”

***Live links to articles:*** [US, Russia hold fence-mending military talks](#), [U.S., Russian Military Chiefs Meet in Helsinki](#), [US, Russian Military Chiefs Meet to Discuss Georgia](#), [Russian, US Military Chiefs Meet in Helsinki](#), [Top Military Officers Talk in U.S.-Russia Conference](#), [U.S., Russian Military Chiefs Discuss Missile Defense](#).

## **Recommended Readings**

### **Afghan Taliban Rejects Karzai’s Safety Vow**

By Sayed Salahuddin, Reuters, November 17, 2008

Last Sunday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai offered safe passage for insurgent leaders on condition that they were prepared to negotiate. Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, rejected the offer and reiterated that foreign troops had to leave before any negotiations could begin. In his message to Reuters from an undisclosed location, he asserted that insurgents didn’t need Karzai’s safety guarantee since they were already safe in Afghanistan. According to Omar, a real cause of the problems in the country is foreign occupiers.

Some experts argue that Karzai made his offer of safe passage not so much in the expectation it would be accepted by Mullah Omar, but to emphasize his message to other Taliban. *Read the full article [here](#).*

### **Japan Says Missile Defense Test Failed**

Agence France-Press, November 20, 2008

Japanese officials announced that a test of a missile shield developed jointly with the U.S. had ended in failure. On November 19, during the test off Hawaii a Japanese warship failed to shoot down a dummy missile. It is still not known what went wrong in the test that cost \$63 million dollars, excluding the missile, and official investigation is under way.

Tokyo and Washington have been working on installing a shield against possible attacks from North Korea, not unprecedented in the past: a missile was fired in 1998 and an atomic bomb tested in 2006. *Read the full article [here](#).*

## **Poland Seeks Signs of Obama's Missile Defense Plans**

Global Security Newswire, November 20, 2008

According to the Associated Press report, Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski is looking forward to learning the U.S. President-elect Barack Obama's intentions in regard to missile defense installations in Europe. The original plan was to deploy 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar base in the Czech Republic in 2009, but Obama was skeptical about it arguing that before deployment the technology must be proven effective.

Poland signed an agreement on missile defense with the current U.S. administration and is therefore concerned as to whether their plans will remain unaltered. The Czech parliament, too, expressed uneasiness on the subject, uncertain about the future of the missile defense project.

"The working assumption is that on the whole countries with U.S. troops on them don't get invaded," Sikorski said. At the same time, it is important to make further attempts to address Russia's concerns about the missile shield. According to Sikorski, Russian officials would be able to conduct technical monitoring and inspections of the interceptor site, although they would not be allowed to be present there at all times. *Read the full article [here](#).*

## **Ankara Wants to Organize Meeting between Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia**

By B. Hasanov, TrendNews, November 14, 2008

Turkey, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, has signaled its intentions to assist in accelerating the realization of the UN resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To that end, Ankara decided to hold the next meeting between Azerbaijan's and Armenia's leaders in Turkey.

The last meeting took place in Moscow in early November, attended by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, and Russian President, Dmitriy Medvedev. Initiated by the Russian President, the meeting turned out to be very productive, and considerable steps had been taken in the direction of settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Moscow Declaration was signed, calling for the settlement of the conflict in line with the principles and norms of international law. *Read the full article [here](#).*

## **Shouting and Pounding, Iraqis Fight over US Pact**

By Christopher Torchia, Associated Press, November 20, 2008

A new pact proposed by the United States establishes for the first time a clear timetable for the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq. According to the security agreement, they must be out of cities by June 30, 2009, and the entire country by the end of 2011. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has publicly defended the pact twice last week, and the Cabinet also approved the agreement on November 14, 2008.

This measure, however, created an uproar among loyalists of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Ajeel Abdul-Hussein, the senior Sadrist lawmaker, affirmed that the agreement ushers in a new occupation of Iraq, “the duration of which we cannot tell.” As a consequence, on November 20, Sadrist lawmakers tried to make as much noise as possible in an attempt to drown out a lawmaker reading the agreement aloud. But eventually parliament completed the reading, which was the last step before opening debate on the pact. *Read the full article [here](#).*

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**Sources:** International Relations and Security Network, Global Security, Defense News, Associated Press, Reuters, Novosti@Mail.Ru, Lenta.ru, Polit.ru, Echo.msk.ru, Regnum.ru, InoSmi.Ru, Kommersant, Izvestia.ru, Ukrinform, RT-24/7, Mail and Guardian, Trend News, RIA Novosti, Voice of America, World Politics Review, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, CNN, Inter Press Service, Novosti NEWSru, Washington Post, NATO, Interfax, Global Security Newswire, Euro News, Al Jazeera.

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