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Growing tensions in the NATO-Russia Relationship

Military exercises start with mutiny, Russia denies involvement

Earlier this month, the controversial and much anticipated NATO military exercises went underway in Georgia. The exercises (which are supposed to last a month) began much to the criticism and dismay of the Russians who argued that it would increase the instability in the region, especially after their 5-day war just nine months earlier. A day before the exercises began, Georgian Defense Ministry officials were greeted by a Georgian tank battalion mutiny consisting of 500 soldiers preventing them from entering the site near Tbilisi. It is said that the mutiny was organized to disrupt the military exercises that were supposed to take place. As well, leaders of the battalion were overheard planning an uprising and expressing desire to overthrow Georgian President Saakashvili and his government.

Although it is apparent that Russia does not support the NATO military exercises being performed on Georgian soil, they were adamant in expressing their respect for not getting involved with Georgia's domestic affairs and denied any involvement in the mutiny. Russia has continually expressed disapproval for these exercises and feels that it may undermine the relationship that both NATO and Russia have been working on improving. However, with this being said, officials have stated that they are sure Russia is involved, but will not point fingers until more evidence has been found.

Russia's involvement in the mutiny has been questioned with the release of surveillance tapes showing former Georgian major, Gia Ghvaladze planning the uprising "on behalf of Russia." Since this footage, police have so far arrested 20 suspects on counts of organizing the mutiny. Apparently, the leaders of the mutiny misled the soldiers involved by instructing them to take combat positions in preparation for a Russian attack.

Tit-for-tat expulsions: "rules of the game"

In response to NATO's expulsion of two Russian envoys from their Brussels Headquarters, Moscow has followed suit and one week later, expelled two diplomats, Director, Isabelle François and her Deputy Director, Mark Opgenorth, from their NATO Information Office. Both are Canadian citizens and the only two international workers at that NATO office.

Foreign Affairs Minister, Lawrence Cannon has been reassured that Russia's decision was not an aggressive act towards Canada or the two Canadian diplomats. Rather, it was an act of retaliation that they were forced to make towards NATO.

Francois and Opgenorth's expulsion has been explained as a tit-for-tat decision made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after two Russian envoys were accused of espionage and were banned from NATO headquarters in Brussels at the end of April. Dmitry Rogozin, the Russian Ambassador to NATO, said that both accused men were not spies and threatened that Russia's response will be "harsh and decisive." However, NATO and Canadian officials have claimed that Russia's action is counter-productive and is very much regretted.

Live links to articles: [On Eve of NATO Exercise, Georgia says it Foiled Mutiny](#), [Georgia foils mutiny at military base ahead of training activities](#), [NATO holds Georgia war games, Russia critical](#), [Russia tensions spike as NATO starts Georgia war games](#), [Russia Expels NATO Envoys as Georgian War Games Begin](#), [NATO Expels 2 Russian Diplomats Accused of Spying](#), [NATO expels Russian envoys, raps pact on Georgia](#), [Russia expels Canadian diplomats](#), [Russia says expulsion of diplomats not directed against Canada: Cannon](#), [Canadian Diplomats Expelled in Spy Feud](#)

Dealing with a Growing Pakistani Insurgency

The situation in Pakistan is growing more severe as insurgents gained control of the Buner region only 60 miles outside of the capital, Islamabad. These developments largely signal the end of the fragile truce which was forged between the militants and the Pakistani government in an attempt to bring the radicals under control. Now, the risk of a "jihadist state" emerging from a nuclear armed Pakistan is becoming a terrifying possibility.

In an effort to address this crisis, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan President Harmid Karzai met with President Obama in early May to attempt to forge a coordinated military strategy to confront the insurgents streaming in across the 1,600-mile border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The outcome of these discussions could not be more important for President Obama who has vowed to narrow the war in Afghanistan to destroying al-Qaeda. The fact that the majority of al-Qaeda members shelter in and operate out of Pakistan, a country which would never allow US troops to operate on its soil, means that Obama's success will largely depend on Pakistan's willingness to become "more aggressive" in its dealings with al-Qaeda. The Pakistani military, however, has long been accused of abetting the radical movement, choosing instead to focus its troops and resources on its historical rival, India.

President Obama must now convince the Pakistani military that its more immediate priority should be to tame the insurgency and prevent them from toppling the government, rather than preparing to repel an unlikely invasion from India. In the meantime, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has been vocal in her concern over the fate of Pakistan, calling the possibility of militants gaining control of the nuclear armed state "unthinkable" and a "mortal threat" to the world.

The strong messages from Washington, in part, appear to be getting through. The Pakistani military has since sent almost 15,000 troops to try and oust 5,000 militants from the Swat Valley. Since April, helicopter attacks and military raids have reportedly killed 750 insurgents. Despite this, experts believe that the Pakistani forces, plagued by a lack of equipment and counter-insurgency training, will likely meet with greater resistance than anticipated. Many also condemn the heavy-handed tactics which are

blamed for several civilian casualties and forcing the panicked exodus of up to eight hundred thousand civilians living in the region, sowing the seeds for a humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, the few Pakistani units which make up the Frontier Corps assigned to guard the Afghan-Pakistani border are proving ineffective and undisciplined. The U.S. has already pledged billions of dollars to equip and train the Pakistani military in an effort to remedy this deficit.

Lastly, the conditions inside Afghanistan are only facilitating the ease with which Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives move between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These militants still command considerable support from sympathetic Afghan villagers who provide them with shelter. Moreover, the American strategy of attacking al-Qaeda hideouts in Pakistan using unmanned aerial drones is only driving militants back into Afghanistan where it is considered safer. In recent displays of the insurgents' continuing ability to strike, several NATO supply depots and routes traversing Pakistan into Afghanistan have come under attack. As the situation in Pakistan continues to deteriorate, all eyes will be on Washington and how it will respond. Unless circumstances improve, the terrorist threat stemming from Afghanistan may pale in comparison to the one which could emerge from nuclear armed Pakistan.

Live links to articles: [Pakistan Overshadows Afghanistan on US Agenda](#), [The Taliban Tightens Hold in Pakistan's Swat Region](#), [The Tribal Areas and Terrorist: The Battle for Control of Pakistan](#), [Pakistan: possible outcomes of the crackdown in Swat](#), [Pakistan and the Taliban: a real offensive, or a phony war?](#), [Pakistan's British-Drawn Borders](#), [Taliban tighten hold on Pakistan as army backs off](#), [Porous Pakistani Border Could Hinder U.S.](#), [Trucks torched at NATO supply terminal in Pakistan](#).

Recommended Readings

Afghan President, Karzai to run for re-election

Khaleej Times Online, April 27, 2009 and Al Jazeera English, May 4, 2009

Nearing the end of his five-year term, current Afghan President Hamid Karzai has announced that he will run for re-election at the presidential elections being held in August. The Supreme Court extended Mr. Karzai's term from late this month to when the vote will take place, in response to concerns over logistics as well as security within the region.

As the war-torn country's second-ever presidential election, many Afghans are unsure whether Mr. Karzai is capable of holding another term in office due to his declining popularity. Although a strong supporter for democracy, Mr. Karzai has been largely criticized for his failure to control the violence from the Taliban insurgency and for not reducing the number of civilian casualties as a result of the U.S.-led war. Mr. Karzai has admitted to making mistakes in the past, but felt the need to run for re-election "to be at the service of the Afghan people."

Keep a look out for the results of the election being held on August 20th, 2009.

Read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).

Tamil Tigers surrender, ending 26-year civil war

Al Jazeera English, May 18, 2009 and Reuters, May 18, 2009

For the first time since 1983, the Sri Lankan government has once again taken control of the entire country. With a civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that had lasted 26 years, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa finally declared total victory this past weekend. The victory follows the release of the last 72,000 civilians stranded in the war zone, and the death of at least 70 Tamil Tigers trying to flee from the area. The founder and leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran was among those dead. He had promoted the break up of Sri Lanka to form an independent Tamil homeland.

The LTTE is notorious for its methods of violence. It has been responsible for hundreds of assassinations and suicide bombings in Sri Lanka, and has used approximately 50,000-100,000 civilians as human shields. Since the civil war started in 1983, more than 70,000 people have been killed, with the United Nations stating that at least 6,000 of them and hundreds of thousands of others have been displaced in the last four months only. Many of those who managed to escape (most of whom were women and children) were sick, hungry and malnourished.

Will the end of this conflict finally bring peace to Sri Lanka?

Read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).

Growing Taliban Insurgency: U.S. Replaces Top General in Afghanistan and NATO appoints new SACEUR

Welt Online, English News and NATO.int, May 12, 2009

In their latest efforts to refocus the war in Afghanistan, the Obama Administration has asked for the resignation of current U.S. and NATO Commander in Afghanistan, Army General David McKiernan. McKiernan has served less than a year of his scheduled 18-24 month rotation. His replacement will be Army Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal who has made a name for himself leading secret special forces counter-insurgency operations in Iraq. Additionally, Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, who also has proven his skills in fighting insurgency in the eastern part of Afghanistan, will be made the Deputy Commander. The sudden and public shift towards commanders with expertise in fighting insurgency is the most visible display yet of the Obama administration's efforts to respond to a mounting Taliban insurgency. The changes in command will also coincide with the influx of an additional 21,000 U.S. troops. The aim is to squelch a continuing deterioration in the security situation marked by an increase in insurgency violence and mounting civilian death tolls.

In another important change of command, President Obama asked NATO to release the current Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), General Bantz J. Craddock, and appoint in his place Admiral James G. Stavridis. The other 27 NATO member countries sitting on the Defence Planning Committee have approved this request, which will become final pending U.S. Senate confirmation. SACEUR is the most senior commander in the NATO military operations structure. He also serves the dual role of Commander of U.S. forces in Europe.

Read the full articles [here](#) and [here](#).

Sources: The New York Times, CNN, Reuters, France 24, Bloomberg, The Ottawa Citizen, The National Post, CBC News, The Moscow Times, Khaleej Times, Al Jazeera, Welt Online, Spiegel Online International, International Herald Tribune, The Economist, The Washington Post, NATO, Sydney Morning Herald, Jerusalem Post.

We would like to know your opinion. Please, [email us](#) with your comments and suggestions!

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