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New U.S. General Takes over in Afghanistan

After being introduced to NATO Foreign Ministers during their gathering in Brussels, the new U.S. Commander of the international troops in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, officially took up his duties in Kabul. His sudden appointment in May following the premature ousting of his predecessor, marks the beginning of the U.S.'s new push to battle the Taliban insurgency with more rigor. McChrystal, an expert in fighting counter-insurgency, will have his hands full. His colleague, Gen. David Petraeus, acknowledged that violence in Afghanistan has reached its highest levels since 2001, evident in the fact that in just one week in June, there were a reported 400 insurgent attacks, compared to only 50 in the whole month of January, 2004. McChrystal is also taking over at a time when civilian deaths as a result of coalition fighting are hitting an all time high. The backlash against civilian deaths has been one barrier to winning the hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan, and Gen. McChrystal has called for the protection of the civilian population using more precise and intelligence-driven operations aimed at protecting civilians and infrastructure projects. He was reminded of this paramount responsibility during one of his first meetings upon arriving in Afghanistan, a sit down with Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai. McChrystal responded that his troops will take care, but that they will also not be timid. Nonetheless, he has pledged to reduce the number of civilian deaths.

Gen. McChrystal will be commanding the largest U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan since the war began. Under his command, there will be nearly 56,000 U.S. Troops and almost 30,000 coalition forces from 40 different countries. He will also be coming in with a so called "dream team" of his own. As a sign of the new priority and impetus the Obama administration is devoting to Afghanistan, Gen. McChrystal has been given a 'carte blanche' to pick the experts he desires, from intelligence to counter-insurgency commanders from the coveted Joint Staff pool. This 'dream team' will consist of approximately 400 U.S. officers and soldiers who will rotate in and out of Afghanistan during the course of 3 years. It will be the first time that a corps will be solely dedicated to one operational theater – Afghanistan. In addition to this robust military team, the U.S. has also installed a highly experience diplomatic team, consisting of three former Ambassadors as assistants to the current U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan.

McChrystal will spend the next 60 days conducting a review of the current strategy and needs in Afghanistan. He will then submit his report to President Obama who will decide on a new course for Afghanistan. The stakes are high, admits Secretary of

Defence Robert Gates, and 2009 will be a decisive year in demonstrating if the war can be turned for the better.

Live links to articles: [U.S Commander in Afghanistan Is Given More Leeway](#), [Protect civilians, Karzai tells new NATO commander](#), [New Commander takes charge in Afghanistan](#), [US Gen. McChrystal takes command in Afghanistan](#), [US general takes command in Afghanistan](#), [Petraeus: Afghan Violence Hits Highest Level Since 2001](#).

Recommended Readings

Russia Rejects the Notion of a Joint Missile System in Europe

The International Herald Tribune, June 11, 2009

A comment made by U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates during Senate testimony garnered little reaction in the American media, but became front page news across Russia. The statement referred to the possibility of Russia and the United States collaborating on a European missile defence shield. A spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry quickly denounced the proposal, stating that such an agreement would be unacceptable so long as the U.S. proceeds with its current plans to deploy elements of its missile defence system in the Czech Republic and Poland. Former Russian President Vladimir Putin called for a joint missile defence program in the past, but the U.S. had never considered this proposal as a replacement for its current deployments in the Czech Republic and Poland.

For their part, Russian political analysts caution that if the U.S. entertains the notion of sharing a missile defence system with Russia, while simultaneously refusing to move its existing deployments, Russia would have every reason to believe the current U.S. system is designed to target it. At the same time, these unusually candid remarks by Secretary Gates mark the first time the U.S. has openly considered stationing missile defence components in Russia. Whether this new approach will turn out to be a fruitful step in the Obama administration's attempts to "reset" relations with Russia is yet to be determined. Read the full article [here](#).

NATO to reduce soldiers in Kosovo

Al Jazeera English, June 11, 2009

In recognition of continued improvements in the security situation in Kosovo, NATO Defence Ministers have agreed to begin withdrawing some of the 14,000 NATO peacekeepers still operating in the country since 1999. The withdrawal will begin slowly, with an end goal of reducing troop numbers to approximately 2,000 within two years. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer acknowledged that no specific date has been set for when the withdrawal would begin, but that it would likely be by January 1, 2010.

The withdrawal will come as welcome news for those involved in NATO's operations in Afghanistan, a mission which has been unable to refresh its troop levels for some time now. The withdrawal from Kosovo will free up troops for redeployment to Afghanistan. NATO allied nations have been unwilling to commit more troops to the mission, in part due to severe cutbacks in defence spending caused by the global economic crisis. U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates cautioned that the troop withdrawal from Kosovo should not be done in a manner which would compromise the security gains which have been made there. Read the full article [here](#).

Who is Winning the Arctic Game of Monopoly?

Spiegel Online International, June 11, 2009

In the past, large armies and huge naval armadas were a countries means for attaining wealth and prestige. Today, it might well be the arctic. With rich deposits of oil and gas quickly becoming exploitable as global warming melts the ice, 5 nations race to claim the arctic territories, and their promise of energy security, for themselves. Canada, the United States, Russia, Norway and Greenland (in this case, represented by Denmark), must also rely on new methods to lay their claim – science. Existing International laws prove too vague, forcing nations to turn to geology to prove that arctic territory is a natural extension of their continental shelves. How do the nation's claims currently stand?

Most experts believe that the United States, which has remained on the side-lines for too long, has little voice left to make a solid claim. Canada, although an arctic nation, has too little infrastructure and investment projects to mount any sizable defence of its arctic claims. Norway is looking to the arctic as a means of prolonging its current oil and gas boom, which will soon end as its own reserves run dry. Continued dispute with Russia over the Barents Sea, further threatens its claim. Greenland is desperately seeking arctic resources to enhance its wealth so it can claim independence from Denmark, but threats to the environment and its small and unskilled workforce might hamper this endeavor.

This leaves Russia, by most estimates, the country which is best prepared to claim the biggest sections of arctic. Aside from heavily investing in arctic equipment such as ice breakers and submersibles, Russia has the strongest legal claims to arctic territory before the United Nations. Once it gets the expected green light from New York, it will proceed to build more infrastructure in the North, hence making a permanent mark of its Northern conquest. Although the race for the arctic remains cordial, as global warming and the depletion of oil and gas makes countries more desperate, the Arctic's freeze may soon become the next hot spot for military confrontation. Read the full article [here](#).

A Shattered Dream in Georgia: EU Probe Creates Burden for Saakashvili

Spiegel Online International, June 15, 2009

The European Union has set up a commission to investigate the cause of last year's five day war between Georgia and Russia. Preliminary findings are pointing to Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili as having precipitated the war by ordering an attack on the capital of the breakaway state of South Ossetia. The repercussions of this report, which would show that Georgia is a liability, can prove disastrous for Georgia's NATO aspirations.

The findings show that Saakashvili, who had long boasted about using the military to restore Georgia's territorial integrity, authorized 12,000 troops and 75 tanks to begin bombing Tskhinvali during the night of August 7, 2008. Investigators further note that under Article 51 of the UN Charter, Russia, who had peacekeepers stationed in the region since 1992, had the right to self-defence. Consequently, Russia began its troop and tank movement on August 8, 2008, in response to Georgia's initial attack. Nonetheless, the investigators note that Russia is not blameless, using a disproportionate amount of force in its response, including ordinance such as cluster-munitions which are deemed prohibited for use in war.

The final report will be submitted to the European Union's Council of Ministers in late July. It will include eye-witness testimony and interviews from diplomats, military

officials and civilians regarding their observations of the events. The investigation, although one of the most in-depth to date, will still be unable to answer several important questions, such as the role of the United States as well as the motives for action by either participants. Hence, while the report represents one step in the search to find more clarity on the short yet poignant war, it also shows that there is a long way to go for the truth, if at all, to emerge. Read the full article [here](#).

Sources: International Herald Tribune, Spiegel International Online, The Sydney Morning Herald, Al Jazeera, FOX news, The Globe and Mail, The Washington Post.

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