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Increasing death toll, lack of resources, and failing support: problems with the Afghan mission

Ever since the mission's focus has changed with the appointment of a new ISAF Commander, General Stanley McCrystal, more instability in Afghanistan is starting to show. McCrystal's strategy is to focus on a military push against the Taliban to extend security. However, the presence of corruption within the Afghan government makes it difficult to accomplish. It was just earlier this month when an Afghan Police Chief (who was one of the non-Pashtun ethnic minorities in the region) was killed by a roadside bomb in Jalrez, known as the "American-model town." The Taliban, who are predominately Pashtun, were thought to have fled the area as a result of the increased number of American forces on patrol there. The town was supposed to display a Taliban-free model of safety and security, however, this attack brings forward the belief that insurgents have once again returned to the area.

In the meantime, the US and British troop numbers have been increased in an attempt to stabilize the region before the Presidential elections take place in August. However, it is apparent that this increase in forces has equally resulted in an increase in coalition fatalities as well. Apparently, this was already expected by US Commanders after Obama increased troop deployment by another 21,000 US troops alone – which meant that the British had to step up their game and increase troop deployment as well. Within the first 10 days of July, 15 British soldiers have already died – with eight of them killed within a 24-hour period. Three of those eight were just 18 years old. When the current number of British fatalities is combined with the death rate of other coalition forces, the total death rate for the month of July is approximately three soldiers per day.

This has caused uproar in the British community as many have expressed concern regarding the major losses in recent days. David Cameron, leader of the opposition in Britain, blames British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government for not providing enough resources and equipment for the ISAF campaign. Cameron argues that an increase in helicopters is needed while also stating that out of the 500 British Army helicopters, only 30 of them are currently being used in Afghanistan. He also argues that other NATO countries are not contributing enough, as efforts to get them to supply helicopters have failed. Brown, however, insists that the recent deaths were not caused by the lack of helicopters as his government has increased their numbers by 60% and capability by 84% in the past two years. The British government and military are

confident that they are following the right strategy and that the involvement in Afghanistan is essential for the overall security of the West and the UK. With that being said, they are taking into account what the critics have been saying and have started to take steps in hopes to reduce casualties.

People have started to become more disillusioned by the war, including soldiers themselves. Polls show that many allies are showing decreased support for the mission. Despite most citizens wanting their soldiers to come home and more allies pulling back on support, the German parliament has recently made a new decision; they will be extending the Bundeswehr (German Army) mandate by committing more soldiers and equipment to the NATO-led mission. Although the Bundeswehr troops are supposed to be involved in civil reconstruction, "incidences of violent combat are on the rise."

Live links to articles: [Explosion Kills Afghan Police Chief and 3 Officers, Helmand's long and difficult road, US troops killed in Afghan blasts, PM defends Afghanistan strategy, Thousands honour repatriated men, Brown defiant on Afghan equipment, Troops 'at risk' over helicopters, July Is Deadliest for US-Led Forces in Afghanistan, Crisis mounts over Afghanistan as UK troop deaths exceed Iraq total, Double-Talk on Afghanistan Reaching 'New Level of Absurdity', 'A NATO Exit Would Be Devastating for Afghanistan', 'PM 'will listen to Army demands', Commentary: West stares into Afghan abyss, British forces in Afghanistan and the soldier home from the hill](#)

“Resetting” the Russia-US Relationship: The Successes and Pitfalls of Traveling Diplomacy

The so-called “reset” of the Russia-US relationship got its first real test in July, beginning with US President Barack Obama’s visit to Moscow. Noteworthy achievements were made, particularly in the area of nuclear arms reductions whereby both countries pledged to reduce their nuclear arsenals by one-quarter, as well as Russia allowing US planes to use its airspace for operations in Afghanistan. Yet, the highly touted visit also highlighted existing rifts. The first indication of a remaining chill was evident in the surprisingly cool and low-key public reception of Obama. Instead of the usual throngs of “Obamamaniacs,” the President was greeted by a respectful, yet unenthusiastic audience of graduating students at the country’s top Economic school, the site of Obama’s keynote address. Despite White House officials pegging this speech as a follow up to Obama’s foreign policy addresses in Prague and Cairo, it was only broadcast on one Russian newscast. Many explain this “timid” reception as stemming from a public which remains cynical, fiercely nationalistic, and disillusioned with the promise of good relations with America. Obama’s meetings with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, proved cordial, although his meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, the real power holder in Moscow, revealed more evidence of frigidness. In his own words, President Obama described Putin as “shrewd, unsentimental,” and that he did not “anticipate a meeting of minds anytime soon.” Obama was principally referring to the continued stalemate over the brief Russian war with Georgia and the status of the two breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Only days after Obama’s Moscow visit, another series of events demonstrated that relations might not be “reset”. First, President Medvedev made a surprise visit to South Ossetia’s capital, Tskhinvali, meeting with its leader, Eduard Kokoity. The visit, his first since the brief war in August 2008, was used by Medvedev to express Russia’s solidarity and support for the newly “independent” state, which he said remains “under perpetual threat from a Georgian attack.” Meanwhile, Prime Minister Putin is scheduled to visit the other contested region of Abkhazia later this summer.

In response, the US sent one of its destroyers, the USS Stout, to anchor off the Georgian coast of Batumi in preparation for exercises with the Georgian coast guard.

This marked the 6th time a U.S. Naval vessel has docked in Georgia, ensuring a visible demonstration of the “strategic” alliance between the U.S. and Georgia. Russia already responded by staging Air Force exercises on its border with Georgia, where Russian jets practiced bombing fictional targets.

In a final, yet equally important moment, President Medvedev announced that Russia is still considering placing missiles near Poland if the U.S. missile defence sites planned for deployment in the Czech Republic and Poland are not removed. He even hinted that the proposed cuts to Russia’s nuclear arsenal will also be contingent on this. Coming only four days after Obama’s visit, many fear that these remaining rifts could undermine any positive gains made in Moscow. To add to Obama’s personal bid to mend relations with Russia, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will meet with her Russian counter-part on the margins of the ASEAN regional summit to continue important discussions. In the meantime, Vice-President Joe Biden will be visiting Ukraine and Georgia in an effort to reaffirm America’s commitment to the two countries, while also pressing them to continue their promised reforms. Hence while America attempts to “reset” its relations with Russia, it is clear that it continues to court its Eastern European allies, highlighting the difficult balancing act it must now perform.

Live links to articles: [America and Eastern Europe: Not captivating now](#), [Lavrov to meet Clinton within ASEAN events in Thailand – FM](#), [Medvedev Visits South Ossetia and Promises Help in Rebuilding](#), [Medvedev Warns U.S. Against Missile Shield](#), [President Backs S. Ossetia on First Trip to Tskhinvali](#), [In Russia, Obama’s Star Power Does Not Translate](#), [The Russia/America summit](#), [Barack, Dmitry – and \(offstage\) Vladimir](#), [U.S. Destroyer Anchors off Georgia](#), [US sailors train Georgians in show of support](#), [US/Russian tensions rise over Georgia](#).

Recommended Readings

India gets a nuclear agreement: is this fair?

Reuters, July 20, 2009 and BBC News, July 20, 2009

After much debate over nuclear weapons in other parts of the world, it seems that the US has finally changed its mind about India. US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton’s short visit to the capital proved to be a success in following President Barack Obama’s commitment to strengthen ties with India and to make them a global player on the world stage. On July 20th, India and the US agreed on a defense pact to allow the sale of American weapons to India to modernize their military. This “end-use monitoring” method would produce greater defense cooperation between both states, as well as giving the US ability to check that India has been using the weapons appropriately and that technologies won’t be leaked. According to Clinton, Delhi has also approved two sites that US companies could use to build nuclear power plants.

While many argue that these agreements would only increase Washington’s power over India’s affairs, Clinton has explicitly stated that they would try not to impose conditions on India that would affect their economic growth and development. Analysts have said this move by the US was to make up for the lack of attention given to India as they were too busy focusing on battling insurgents with Pakistan’s military.

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

German Forces Intensify Fighting Against the Taliban

Spiegel Online, July 22, 2009

In yet another sign of the worsening situation in Afghanistan, the German military is launching its biggest operation since deploying in Afghanistan. The goal is to “cleanse” the region from a resurgent Taliban in the lead up to the Afghan elections, which will take place in August. The northern part of Afghanistan has largely been considered one of the safest regions, yet 300 German soldiers will now join 1,200 Afghans in offensive military operations. This marks a significant move away from Germany’s stabilization efforts, as orders to arm German jets with live ammunition and missiles were given for the first time. The operation also poses a problem for the German government, which has, so far, refused to call its involvement in Afghanistan a war. Whether this rhetoric can be maintained will largely depend on the success of the operations ability to quell the resurging Taliban.

Read the full articles [here](#).

Sources: International Herald Tribune, Spiegel International Online, BBC News, CNN, The Economist, Reuters, World Socialist Web Site, The Moscow Times, The St. Petersburg Times, The Washington Post, ITAR-TASS.

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