

Georgia Offers NATO Transit to Afghanistan

By [Global Research](#)

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Georgia has offered NATO the use of its territory as an alternative transit route to Afghanistan. The move follows the closure of the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan for military use by the U.S.

Tbilisi is, however, ruling out the possibility of NATO setting up a military base in Georgia.

The offer came as NATO defence ministers hold a second day of meetings in the southern Polish city of Krakow.

The Georgian Defence Minister also confirmed the country's intentions to send troops to Afghanistan to take part in the NATO-led anti-terror campaign there.

"Georgia is ready to make its contribution to the continuation of the peace-making operation in Afghanistan", David Sikharulidze, Georgian Defence Minister, said.

Georgian media reported on Thursday that the country would send around 100 servicemen to Afghanistan.

The country has already taken part in the Afghan operation. From September to December 2004, 50 fifty Georgian troops were on duty there.

Meanwhile, Aleksandr Sharavin from the Institute of Political and Military Analysis says the offer does not look attractive to NATO.

"Georgia's offer is both a military and a political one. And of course Tbilisi hopes it could facilitate its way to NATO membership. I do not think Georgia could join the alliance any time soon, but of course NATO will take notice of Georgia's offer. On the other hand Georgia is no replacement for the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan and the route through Georgia is a lot less convenient. So I would not make too much of this offer," he said.

Another issue discussed was the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining the alliance. According to the U.S. Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, Ukraine's membership in NATO is still a long way off.

He said he sees a chance for better relations with Russia now there's a new President in the White House.

Talking about Missile Defence, Robert Gates stressed the U.S. will consider Russia's views in deciding what to do in Eastern Europe.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan open for non-military transit

Meanwhile, two Central Asian states – Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – have agreed on transfer of non-military NATO cargo to Afghanistan.

The news came after U.S. transportation command's logistics department chief, Rear Admiral Mark Harnitchek held a meeting with Tajik Foreign Minister Khamrakhon Zarifi.

The U.S. plans to transport from 50 to 200 auto-transport non-military cargo containers a week through Tajikistan to NATO bases in Afghanistan. They'll be transported by rail to Tajikistan from Uzbekistan first.

Harnitchek stressed that Tajikistan is an important transit country for the U.S. as it is the shortest overland way to the bases in Afghanistan.

The Tajik-Afghan border is 1344 kilometers long. And in 2007 the U.S. spent about \$US 37 million to build a 600-meter-long bridge connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

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