

Obama welcomes Albania, Croatia to NATO

by Robert Burns via rialator - AFP Saturday, Apr 4 2009, 5:57am

international / peace/war / other press

[Those who hesitate (Kosovo) are lost, comrades!]

Where will it end, Han? Do you see the dick in your face, NOW? You have been lied to, conned and screwed and still you do not understand! It may or may not be too late now, however, what is certain is one more NATO move and it's over, Yuri!

I hope you choke on Kosovo, 'comrades!' You failed to DECISIVELY stand your LEGAL ground and support your ally when you had the chance. Now it verges on impossible; Albania, Croatia, soon Macedonia, Montenegro then Georgia, do you doubt it?

'Just desserts' for abandoning a close ally and displaying your cowardice to the world. It would have been much simpler and cleaner then! Enjoy the following report -- I can hear the laughter from Strasbourg in Sydney!

STRASBOURG, France (AP) — Asserting his voice at NATO, President Barack Obama on Saturday welcomed Albania and Croatia to the alliance and declared to other nations that "the door to membership will remain open."

"It is a measure of our vitality that we are still welcoming new members," Obama said of NATO, which is marking its 60th anniversary at a summit dominated by the war in Afghanistan.

Obama, the one doing the welcoming, is himself new to the table. He is taking part in his first NATO summit and seeking support from allied nations toward the plodding effort in Afghanistan, where the new U.S. president is sending in more troops and civilian help.

As the leaders got down to business, the two NATO summit hosts, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, made it clear they embraced new U.S. leadership. "We are very pleased to work with him," Sarkozy said of Obama. "We trust him."

Meanwhile, outside, police fired tear gas and flash bombs at protesters throwing Molotov cocktails and rocks less than 2 miles from the gathering of world leaders. First lady Michelle Obama and other spouses canceled a visit to a cancer hospital out of concern for security, the French president's office said.

One of NATO'S stickiest political issues is how and where to grow. Germany, France and many other NATO nations fear any more NATO eastward expansion will further damage the alliance's ties to Russia.

Said Obama: "The door to membership will remain open for other countries that meet NATO standards and can make a meaningful contribution to allied security."

Founded in 1949, NATO has added members since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, its Soviet-dominated Cold War foe. In contrast to the alliance's previous eastward expansion, which infuriated Russia, Moscow has not objected to the inclusion of Albania and Croatia in NATO.

Albania and Croatia officially joined NATO this week. Obama praised them for having already deployed troops to the NATO-led force in Afghanistan, calling that commitment a sign that both countries will be strong contributors.

"We are proud to have you as allies," Obama said. He also made a pitch for Macedonia and said he looks forward to the day when it will join the alliance, too. Macedonia's accession to NATO has been stalled over a dispute with Greece.

Earlier, in a move symbolic of NATO's unity, Obama began his Saturday by joining Merkel and other heads of states in walking along a pedestrian bridge that links Germany and France across the Rhine River. The leaders met Sarkozy at the center of the bridge, then crossed together onto the French side in Strasbourg and posed for a group photo.

In the midst of an eight-day trip abroad, Obama says it is a new day in U.S.-European relations. But he is likely to encounter the same old story of allied reluctance to send more troops to Afghanistan.

The European allies may pony up a marginal increase in forces keyed to preparations for Afghanistan's national elections in August, but the Obama administration is pinning its main hopes on getting more civilian contributions — particularly trainers for the Afghan police.

At the summit's opening on Friday, capped by a working dinner in nearby Baden-Baden, Germany, Obama promised to repair damaged relations with Europe, asked for support of his new war strategy in Afghanistan and pledged a U.S. commitment to global elimination of nuclear weapons — in the name of keeping nuclear arms out of the hands of terrorists.

The summit's co-hosts, Sarkozy and Merkel, both were quick to offer support for Obama's new Afghan strategy of sending American reinforcements and bolstering the training of Afghan forces. But they would go no farther.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said securing new commitments from allies would neither begin nor end with the NATO meetings, noting that nations need more time to digest *Obama's revamped war strategy*. [It's always WAR with the USA.] Obama's national security adviser, retired Gen. James Jones, [who takes his "orders from Henry Kissinger"] said 'Obama's' new approach to Afghanistan, which calls for widening the approach to include more civilian effort and broadening the focus to include Pakistan, would inspire fresh involvement. "I think there's a new mood," Jones said. [Emphases and bracket inserts added]

(Mark S. Smith contributed to this story from Strasbourg.)

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