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Macedonia revives passions A huge statue of Alexander the Great was placed this week on the central square of Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, in a move that has angered Greece. Athens accuses the former Yugoslav republic of stealing national symbols and has opposed its entry into NATO and the European Union. **PAGE 3**

U.S. rec Afghan

WASHINGTON

Without being explicit, Obama acknowledges need to monitor Pakistan

BY DAVID E. SANGER

Hours after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Pakistan's leaders were given a message by the administration of George W. Bush: Because of the looming war in Afghanistan, the United States

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won't have Pakistan's help, and the United States would have to choose between its alliance with the Taliban and its forces with the United States.

Just shy of 10 years later, President Barack Obama's announcement Tuesday night that he was beginning a gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan marked another step in a gradual reversal of that calculation. Although the president could not say exactly one of the constraints on the United States' retreat from a hard and long decade is the recognition that the United States will no longer be able to do as much as it has on Afghanistan's help to deal with the threats emerging from Pakistan. Declaring in his address that the tide of war is receding, Mr. Obama said that 10,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn.

Macedonia revisits past glory

SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

Citizens applaud statue of Alexander the Great; Greeks call it provocation

BY MATTHEW BRUNWASSER

In the view of many here, the neighbors have been bullying this little Balkan country for a long time.

Bulgarians see its people as Bulgarians with accents. Serbia considers the land Southern Serbia. Greece accuses the country of nothing less than stealing its name, history and national symbols.

This week, Macedonia pushed back.

In a precisely calibrated display of political and civil engineering, workers lifted a 14.5-meter, or 47-foot, bronze statue of Alexander the Great, weighing 30 tons, and placed it on a 15-meter-high pedestal in the central square of Skopje, the capital.

"This is a way for Macedonia to affirm its national existence," said Vasiliki Neofotistos, an anthropologist from the State University of New York at Buffalo studying identity politics in Macedonia. "Macedonia wants to advance the thesis that it is a cornerstone of Western civilization."

This is no mere philosophical dilemma. Macedonia has been stuck in one of the most intractable disputes of the post-communist world: Greece has held international relations hostage for 20 years because it considers the name Macedonia an appropriation of its own Hellenic identity and its northern province of the same name.

If it can't have riches, Macedonia, a country of two million with 31 percent unemployment, wants recognition. Playing up ties to an ancient global celebrity resonates with people who feel they have been marginalized for centuries.

"We are proud of Alexander," said Petko Bozhinovski, 48, who wore a black T-shirt with the Macedonian flag as the statue was raised Tuesday to the applause of several hundred bystanders.

"Finally, our Alexander has come back to his homeland," he said.

The project is controversial — it cost €9.4 million, or \$13 million. But some things, say statue fans, are priceless. "If you lose your identity, you are a

nobody," said Alexandar Ristevski, 32, an ethnographer.

Macedonia was promised an invitation to join NATO in 2008, but this was vetoed by Greece because the name issue was unresolved. In 2005, Macedonia also became a candidate for the European Union, but still has no date to start accession talks because of Greek resistance.

"Why should we change our name because of Greece?" said Alex Trajanovski, a retired diplomat, who said Macedonia had been recognized under that name by 135 countries. "No European Union is worth changing the name," said Zoran Iliev, a border policeman. Greece is equally stubborn. On Tuesday, as the Greek Parliament debated a crucial vote of confidence in the government, Stavros Lambrinidis, the foreign minister, told deputies the statue was a major point of foreign policy, "a

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provocation" that fanned "irredentism, the greatest threat to the Balkans."

Mr. Lambrinidis said Greece had proposed a name with a geographical qualifier to settle the dispute. The Macedonian Foreign Ministry declined to comment.

When Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Greece immediately protested the name and flag — accusing the new country of staking claims to Greek territory and of trying to separate ancient Macedonian civilization from Hellenic culture.

Athens refused to recognize its northern neighbor and organized an embargo. The two countries signed an interim accord in 1995 under which Macedonia would be referred to internationally as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In exchange, Greece lifted its embargo, recognized this provisional name and agreed not to block membership in international institutions.

Almost 16 years later, both sides are still negotiating a new name. They have indicated they might consider a geographical modifier of Macedonia, such as Northern Macedonia — favored by Greece — or Macedonia (Skopje), which the Macedonians like.

Meanwhile, Macedonia has filed suit with the International Court of Justice in The Hague against Greece, accusing it of violating the 1995 agreement. A decision is expected in September.

The statue is part of a controversial facelift for Skopje — a city whose old center was flattened in an earthquake in 1963 — including 15 new buildings, the renovation of old ones and a triumphal arch.

The government estimated the bill for renovation at €80 million in 2009, but the opposition says costs have already risen to €200 million. No official figures are available.

The government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski has also given Alexander's name to the airport in Skopje, a highway and a stadium. The inauguration of the Alexander statue is expected on independence day, September 8.

"This attempt to rebuild the Macedonian nation is definitely destroying the chances for compromise" with Greece, said Vladimir Milcin, executive director of the Open Society Foundation Macedonia. Mr. Milcin noted that the European Union's enlargement commissioner, Stefan Füle, called the statue a "provocation" and suggested for the first time that Macedonia's move toward Europe was going backward.

But neither Mr. Milcin nor a Western diplomat who insisted on anonymity thought this would deter the prime minister. "It's just adding fuel to his power and image that he is the final and only defender of Macedonian name, identity and culture," Mr. Milcin said.

Macedonia's identity politics are further complicated by the restive 25 percent of its population who are ethnic Albanians. In 2000, the ethnic Albanian National Liberation Army fought a six-month war against the majority.

Rafis Aliti, a former fighter with the Albanian rebels, and now deputy speaker of parliament, said the Alexander dispute worried Albanians because "there will be no prospects for the future, no security and foreign investment."

The lure of Macedonian lore has grown in recent years. Alexander has helped buttress the nation against the trauma of the free market, political strife and independence, said Pasko Kuzman, an archaeologist with the Ministry of Culture.

"Alexander conquered the world," he added. "Would you ever give up something like that? I don't think so."