

## Putin fights back

By [Mike Whitney](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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The ongoing fracas between Russia and the Republic of Georgia appears to be a quarrel between neighbors over the arrest of four Russian officers by President Mikhail Saakashvili. In reality, it is a clash between the Bush administration and Vladimir Putin over who will prevail in the struggle to control Central Asia. The stakes couldn't be higher and it looks as though the conflagration could go on for some time to come.

The crisis began last week when Saakashvili arrested the Russian officers and charged them with spying for Moscow. Putin protested their detention to the UN and demanded their immediate release. He then phoned the White House and issued a terse warning that "any actions taken by third parties (the Bush administration) would be considered encouragement of Georgia's destructive policy and were unacceptable for peace and dangerous for the peace and stability of the region." (Itar-Tass News agency)

The phone call shows that Putin knows where the plan originated and who is ultimately responsible. It also illustrates how the relationship between Bush and Putin has steadily deteriorated and is increasingly adversarial.

Saakashvili has since retreated from his hardline position and delivered the four officers to the care of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) The UN group then promptly returned the men to Russia. In the interim, the United States blocked a resolution that would have quickly resolved the dispute, a move which further angered Moscow.

So, what is going on here?

Saakashvili is an American stooge no different than Karzai in Afghanistan. He came to power via the American-sponsored "Rose Revolution" which swept Eduard Shevardnadze from office and replaced him with the Yale-educated neocon puppet, Saakashvili. The "color-coded" revolutions have since been exposed as US-backed charades in which the National Endowment for Democracy-funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) foment political upheaval by providing financial resources, printing presses and logistical support to opposition parties within a given system. It has become the preferred method of "regime change" for the Western elites who favor spreading American-style capitalism by peaceful means rather than Iraq-type violence.

Moscow is on Washington's target list and the issues run deeper than Putin's "alleged" departure from democratic reforms. Putin has joined in a broad-based security alliance with China and other key nations in Central Asia. Under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) the member states have set up a parallel NATO-type collective that threatens to derail Bush's plan to expand American influence throughout the

region. The 19th century Great Game to control Eurasia has resumed under the rubric of the *war on terror* and the nations of the region are realigning themselves to fend off future American intervention.

As Michel Chossudovsky notes in a recent article, "[The Next Phase of the Middle East War](#)" (Global Research): "Military exercises organized by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) were launched in late August. These war games, officially tagged as part of a counter terrorism program were conducted in response to US-Israeli military threats in the region including planned attacks against Iran."

Russia also conducted war games with China earlier in the year, setting aside their traditional differences and suspicions to achieve the mutual goal of enhanced security from foreign aggression. Putin clearly has not been hoodwinked by Bush's fictitious *war on terror*. Like the other leaders in the region, he is anticipating that the US will continue to push into Central Asia, establishing bases and pipeline routes while trying to gain control of the vast reserves of oil and natural gas.

Political heavyweight, Zbigniew Brzezinski, clarified the importance of Central Asia to US plans for global dominance in his book, "The Grand Chessboard."

In it he states, "Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some 500 years ago, Eurasia has been the center of world power" . . ."For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia—and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained." . . ."How America manages Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 percent of the world's people live in Eurasia and most of the world's physical wealth as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for 60 percent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources." ("The Grand Chessboard")

Brzezinski's book provides the basic blueprint (which was further elaborated in the Project for the New American Century) for the administration's present policy in Central Asia. The current maneuverings in Georgia are the predictable flare-ups that result from a policy that is rooted in hostility and expansion.

Washington has used the cover of the Rose and Orange revolutions to push its "cat's paw" NATO further into Eurasia, establish more military bases, and to surround Russia. NATO in Ukraine and Georgia is the equivalent of fully-equipped Russian bases in Toronto and Tijuana. No American president would even consider allowing that to take place.

The growing distrust between Washington and Moscow goes beyond Bush's plan to deploy NATO to the former Soviet republics. Washington is also unhappy with Putin's nationalizing the oil industry (Gazprom) and abandoning the dollar in the oil trade. Just months ago, Putin announced that he would switch from the "international currency" (the greenback) to the ruble. Presently, Russia provides 15.4 percent of world daily output of oil; second only to

Saudi Arabia. Previously, oil transactions had been denominated exclusively in dollars. This de-facto monopoly in the oil trade is a great boon to the American economy. It forces central banks around the world to stockpile mountains of dollars. By some accounts, there could be as much as \$4.6 trillion either in central banks or circulating in oil transactions.

Putin's conversion to the ruble poses a direct threat to America's dollar hegemony and could potentially send hundreds of billions of dollars back to the United States triggering massive hyper-inflation and an economic meltdown. (This may explain why the Federal Reserve cancelled publishing the M-3 report so that dollar holders will not know how many billions are being returned.)

The US must maintain its dominance in the oil trade or the dollar will plummet and the over-leveraged, debt-saturated American empire will disappear in an ocean of red ink.

After Putin stated his intentions, it was clear that Washington would retaliate to defend its interests.

Some readers will remember that two months ago Henry Kissinger paid an unexpected visit to Putin in Moscow. At that time the public was unaware that Kissinger was secretly advising Bush and Cheney on a regular basis. Kissinger most likely warned Putin about the potential dangers of converting to the ruble. He may have pointed out how Saddam was deluged with bombs just six months after he switched to the euro. Hugo Chavez and Ahmadinejad have been threatened, as well. Maintaining the Petrodollar Empire is as critical to US supremacy, as is controlling the last dwindling supplies of oil.

Just two months after Kissinger's visit, Saakashvili swung into action and arrested the four Russian officers. There's little doubt that Washington was behind the incident.

In order to grasp the growing tension between the Kremlin and White House, we have to understand how Russia fits into the neocon cosmology of dependent states. The National Security Strategy (NSS) gives us an idea of where Bush and Co. place Russia in the imperial order.

It says: "[Russia must] understand that Cold War approaches do not serve their national interests and that Russian and American strategic interests overlap in many areas . . . We are facilitating Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization to promote beneficial trade and investment relations. We have created the NATO-Russian Council with the goal of deepening security cooperation among Russia, our European allies and ourselves. We will continue to bolster the independence and stability of the states of the former Soviet Union in the belief that a prosperous and stable neighborhood will reinforce Russia's growing commitment to integration into the Euro-Atlantic community . . . Russia's uneven commitment to the basic values of free market democracy and dubious record in combating the proliferation of WMD remain matters of great concern."

Since the NSS was written, Russia has been blocked (by the US) from joining the WTO and reproached for trying to maintain its authority within its traditional sphere of influence. (Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus etc) The NSS clearly outlines what it takes to stay in Bush's "good graces"; to allow NATO to militarize the states surrounding Russia, to submissively comply with the edicts from Washington, and to integrate the Russian economy with the American-dominated global economic system.

The fiercely nationalistic Putin has chosen to remain independent, which has put him on a collision course with the Bush administration.

The powerful Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) recently released a report that urges Bush to “stop regarding Russia as a strategic partner.” It further states that “Russia has become an increasingly authoritarian state with a foreign policy that is sometimes at odds with the interests of the United States and its allies.” (The report was co-authored by former Senator John Edwards and ex-politician Jack Kemp)

So, the battle lines have been drawn and Russia has been placed on the ever-expanding list of “axis of evil” states whose defiance make them the logical targets of US intervention. We can expect that a variety of strategies will be invoked to destabilize Russia and, ultimately, affect regime change in Moscow. The Bush administration’s long-range objectives are clear. They aim to privatize the Russian oil industry, convert the ruble to the dollar, remove Putin from office, and prevent Russia from controlling the huge oil reserves in the Caspian Basin. America’s success in the region depends on its ability to weaken, disrupt, or dissolve the Russian state. Traditionally, these goals are achieved by covert operations, inciting ethnic tensions, providing military assistance to rebels in Chechnya (or wherever) and grooming dissident groups to foment political turmoil. We expect to see these same tactics employed here.

The Bush administration has big plans for Central Asia. It is a critical part of the ongoing global resource war. The arrest of Russian officers is just one small skirmish in what will undoubtedly be a much larger and more lethal war.

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