

Reinventing the Evil Empire

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For the West, everything changed but stayed the same, hard-wired and in place. Things just lay dormant in the shadows during the Yeltsin years, certain to reemerge once a more resolute Russian leader took over. If not Vladimir Putin, someone else little different.

Russia is back, proud and reassertive, and not about to roll over for America. Especially in Eurasia. For Washington, it's back to the future, the new Cold War, and reinventing the Evil Empire, but this time for greater stakes and with much larger threats to world peace. Conservatives lost their influence. Neocons are weakened but still dominant. The Israeli Lobby and Christian Right drive them. Conflict is preferred over diplomacy, and most Democrats go along to look tough on "terrorism." Notably their standard-bearer, vying with McCain to be toughest.

Several former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Republics are part of NATO: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In addition, Georgia and Ukraine seek membership. Russia is strongly opposed. And now for greater reason after Poland (on August 20) formally agreed to allow offensive US "interceptor missiles" on its soil. A reported 96 short-range Patriot ones also plus a permanent garrison of US troops - 110 transferred from Germany, according to some accounts. Likely more to follow. In addition, Washington agreed to defend Poland whether or not it joins NATO, so that heightens tensions further.

The Warsaw signing followed the Czech Republic's April willingness to install "advanced tracking missile defense radar" by 2012. In both instances, Russia strongly objected, and on August 20 said it will "react (and) not only through diplomatic protests." Both former Warsaw Pact countries are now targets. The threat of nuclear war is heightened. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Doomsday Clock heads closer to midnight - meaning "catastrophic destruction." It's no joking matter.

The US media downplays the threat and hails a pact Zbigniew Brzezinski (a Polish national, former Carter National Security Advisor, and key Obama foreign policy strategist) calls a watershed in the two countries' relationship - "This changes the strategic relationship between the US and Poland. There is a clear and explicit understanding that if there are negative consequences of stationing the missile shield, the US will come to Poland's defense."

On the one hand, a surprising statement from a man critical of Bush administration policies, its failure in Iraq, and the dangers of a widened Middle East war. He fully understands the heightened potential for world conflict but sounds dismissive of the threat. On the other hand, he has bigger fish to fry and apparently willing to wage big stakes on winning. The Iraq war and Iran are distractions by his calculus. The real Great Game embraces all Eurasia

and assuring America comes out dominant – not Russia, not China, nor any rival US alliance.

The major media also downplay the dangers and explain nothing about the high stakes. Instead they beat up on Russia and highlight comments from Secretary Rice that missiles aren't "aimed in any way at Russia," or White House spokesperson Dana Perino saying: "In no way is the president's plan for missile defense aimed at Russia. (It's to) protect our European allies from any rogue threats" that suggests Iran, but, clearly means Russia, according to Hauke Ritz's recent analysis in Germany's influential *Leaves for German and International Politics* journal.

He explained that Iran's missiles can't reach Europe, and that Washington rejected Russia's proposed Azerbaijan-based joint US-Russian anti-missile system – to intercept and destroy Iranian missiles on launch. He thus concluded that Washington's scheme is for offense, not defense. That it targets Russia, not Iran, with Alaskan and other installations close to Russia as further proof. He wrote: "The strategic significance of the system consists of intercepting those few dozen missiles Moscow (can launch) following a first strike. (It's) a crucial element....to develop a nuclear first strike capacity against Russia. The original plan is for....ten interceptor missiles in Poland. But once....established, their number could be easily increased."

According to Ritz, Washington wants a missile system that "guarantee(s) a US (edge) to carry out nuclear war without (risking a) counter-strike." It can then be used for geopolitical advantage "to implement national interests," but it highlights the dangers of possible nuclear confrontation and the catastrophic fallout if it happens.

In an August 20 Veterans of Foreign Wars convention address, Bush was essentially on this theme in focusing on "terrorism" and saying: "We're at war against determined enemies, and we must not rest until that war is won." Georgia "stands for freedom around the world, now the world must stand for freedom in Georgia" – clearly linking Russia's response with "terrorism" and suggesting from his September 2001 address to a joint session of Congress and the American people that: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Any that are "will be regarded....as a hostile state." Clearly, Russia is on his mind just as Moscow is carefully evaluating his threat.

The BBC echoed the US media, covers all the bases, mentioned the Iranian threat, singles out Russia, obfuscates facts about the conflict, sides with Washington and Poland on the new missile deal, and quoted Polish President Lech Kaczynski saying: "no one (with) good intentions towards us and (the West) should" fear the missiles. It also cited a miraculous turnaround in sentiment saying two-thirds of Poles now favor them. Astonishing since overwhelming opposition was recently evident, so it's hard imagining it shifted so fast.

High-Octane Russia Bashing – The Dominant US Media

The Wall Street Journal asserted that Poles "see the US as their strongest ally" given "two centuries of invasions and partitioning by Russia" and other European powers. It also highlighted Russia's "nuclear threat" (not Iran's) in a Gabriel Schoenfeld article painting Russia as an aggressor and America aiding its European allies.

Schoenfeld (a senior editor of the hawkish, pro-Israeli Commentary magazine) cites "Moscow's willingness to crush Georgia with overwhelming force (and claims) the Kremlin has 10 times as many tactical (short-range) warheads as the US." The "shift in the nuclear

imbalance....helped embolden the bear.” He ignores America’s overall nuclear superiority, but it hardly matters as both countries combined have around 97% of these weapons (an estimated 27,000 world total) according to experts like Helen Caldicott – more than enough to destroy the planet many times over.

Nonetheless, Schoenfeld supports the Polish agreement in the face of a “pugnacious Russia (determined to acquire) economic and military power (and) not afraid to use threats and force to get (its) way (with) nuclear weapons central to the Russian geopolitical calculus.” It’s reminiscent of “the dark days of communist yore (and captures the threat of what) we and Russia’s neighbors are up against.”

For the moment, anti-Iranian rhetoric has subsided with Russia the new dominant villain. En route to the NATO Brussels August 18 meeting, Secretary Rice called Russia’s action against Georgia a “very dangerous game and perhaps one the Russians want to reconsider.” Russian “aggression” is the buzzword, and the media dutifully trumpet it.

So do the presidential candidates. John McCain was especially belligerent in denouncing “Russian aggression” and calling on Moscow to “immediately and unconditionally cease its military operations and withdraw all forces from sovereign Georgian territory.” He called for emergency Security Council and NATO meetings in hopes condemnation would follow and “NATO (can act) to stabiliz(e) this very dangerous situation.” He also wants Russia expelled from the G-8 nations and an end to 10 years of partnership and cooperation.

Barak Obama first said that Russia’s “aggression” must not stand and denounced “Russian atrocities.” He then softened his tone somewhat with: “Now is the time for action – not just words....Russia must halt its violation of Georgian airspace and withdraw its ground forces from Georgia, with international monitors to verify that these obligations are met.” But expect those comments to harden as Democrats meet in Denver, and the party’s nominee will likely match his opponent’s tough stance. Or at least try under a slogan of “Securing America’s Future” to advance the nation’s interests in the world. Beating up on Russia is now fair game and made easier with lockstep media support.

The Wall Street Journal is more hostile than most, and practically frothed in its August 16 – 17 weekend edition. It called for “Making Putin Pay (and) Turning Russia’s Georgian rout into a political defeat.” It cited Russian aggression “to remove President Saakasvili from the office to which he was elected in 2004 (and to) overthrow a democratic government.”

It called on “western authorities (to) explore the vulnerability of Russian assets abroad (or) at least make life difficult for the holders of those assets.” The Journal might remember the billions of US fixed income and other investments Russia holds – although the country’s Central Bank reported late July that it pared its \$100 billion in US “mortgage bonds” to \$50 billion early in the year. The US Treasury reports that Russia holds around \$36 billion of Treasury securities with considerably more in private hands.

The Journal then compared Russia to China and managed a slap at both. It said: “In the world of global commerce....China calculated that....staging an Olympic extravaganza (could enhance its) ambivalent reputation....By contrast, the Putin government....seems to believe its power grows in sync with its reputation as an international pariah, an outsider state,” and George Bush added that “Russia has damaged its credibility and its relations with the nations of the free world” – with the Journal writer hardly blinking at such brazen hypocrisy.

Nor did Journal editorial board member Matthew Kaminski in his headlined piece: "Russia Is Still a Hungry Empire" without a hint about the Soviet Union's bloodless 1991 dissolution now down the memory hole in light of today's inflammatory headlines.

Kaminski highlights "Russian tanks rolling through Georgia (with) images of Chechnya in 1994 and '99, Vilnius '91, Afghanistan '79, Prague '68, Hungary '56" and before that Poland, the Baltics and other Eastern European states. "The war in Georgia marks an easy return to territorial expansion and attempted regional dominance."

Boris Yeltsin "tried to give Russians an alternative narrative. (He) put forward democracy as a unifying and legitimizing idea for the new Russian state." But that was swept away when "Putin took over." He's unresponsive to the idea of "partnership with the West and freedom at home." He aims to force "young democracies around Russia....back into Moscow's sphere of influence....The worldview of a Russian nationalist is hard for outsiders to comprehend," and for Kaminski one that mustn't be allowed to stand.

Nor for other Journal contributors daily (in op-eds and editorials) with some of the most outlandish attack journalism heard since before Gorbachev. Claims that "Kremlin capitalism is a threat to the West....by using its market strength in oil and gas resources to strong-arm its neighbors and outmaneuver the US and EU." And that Russia's real aim "is to replace a pro-western government with a new Russian satellite....reminiscent of the Brezhnev doctrine. (It's) part of a broader campaign (to annex new territory, expand the Russian empire, conduct) cyber attacks against the Baltic states, (assassinate enemies, and use) economic intimidation (through) cutoffs of Russian oil and gas shipments to Ukraine and the Czech Republic....It is important that Moscow pays a concrete and tangible price for its latest aggression, at least comparable to (what) it paid for the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan."

The New York Times is more measured but, on August 19, highlighted "Survivors in Georgia Tell of Ethnic Killings" with suggestions of "ethnic cleansing" - a practice that "haunted the borderlands of the old Soviet bloc." Villages were "burned and houses broken; unburied bodies lay rotting; fresh graves were dug in gardens and basements....most victims interviewed (were) ethnic Georgians....(In central Georgian) villages, some killings were carried out for revenge....some (involved) theft (and still others) seemed to be that the power balance was shifting, away from ethnic Georgians to the Ossetian separatists and their Russian backers."

Independent reporters on the ground contradicted The Times and similar US media accounts. One wrote: "Georgians living in several of the villages said the Russians occupying their land had treated them well, done nothing to encourage them to leave and offered the only protection available from the South Ossetian militias they feared most" and perhaps their own army in an effort to inflict harm and blame it on Russia.

On August 21, The Times headlined: "US Sees Much to Fear in a Hostile Russia (by) usher(ing) in a sustained period of renewed animosity with the West....problems extend(ing) far beyond (arms deals with) Syria and the mountains of Georgia." Others with "anti-American states like Iran and Venezuela." Pressuring US "military bases in Central Asia....counterterrorism, Hamas" and numerous other issues. Obama's chief Russia advisor, Stanford University professor Michael McFaul, was quoted saying Russia appears intent on "disrupt(ing) the international order" and can do it. They're "the hegemon in that region and we are not and that's a fact."

“Russia has all the leverage,” according to Carnegie Moscow Center’s Masha Lipman (with potential for causing headaches” if it chooses – in the region, the UN, on Iran, Zimbabwe, and to halt “any kind of coercive actions, like economic sanctions or anything else,” according to former National Security Council advisor Peter Feaver. An old post-Cold War concern is now arisen. Russia is now “a spoiler.”

An August 21 AP report cites an example in its headlined piece” “Russia blocks Georgia’s main (oil) port city” of Poti and continues to hold positions around Gori and Igoeti....30 miles west of....Tbilisi.”

Reports from Other Sources

On August 21, Russia Today reported that “Abkhazia rallied for independence (and) the Abkhazian Parliament has approved an official appeal to Russia to recognize its independence.” Tens of thousands rallied in support, and on August 23, Reuters reported that South Ossetia did as well and its president, Eduard Kokoity, plans to ask Russia and the international community for recognition. Russia’s Deputy Federation Council Speaker, Svetlana Orlova, told the rally that “Russia is always with you and will never leave you in the lurch.”

On August 23, The New York Times reported that “the Kremlin is nearing formal recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, possibly as early as next week.” Apparently likely according to Russian Regional Development Minister, Dmitry Kozak, who told Itar-Tass “support is likely (and) that after all the events that have occurred, one should not expect otherwise.”

On August 21, Abkhazian President Sergey Bagapsh “appealed to Russia and to governments of other countries to recognize Abkhazia’s independence,” for both his province and South Ossetia. On August 20, Interfax reported that the Russian Federation Council (Russia’s upper House of parliament) is prepared to recognize both provinces’ independence if their people “express such a will....and if the Russian president makes a relevant decision on this score,” according to Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov.

On August 25, Russia Today reported that (in emergency session) the Federation Council unanimously voted to ask President Medvedev to recognize Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence. Both province presidents addressed the chamber and “again said they will never agree to remain within Georgia” and are more entitled to independence than Kosovo. Konstantin Zatulin, deputy head of the Duma Committee for International Affairs in Russia’s State Duma, its lower chamber, stated that his body “most probably” will go along.

At the same time, tensions remain high. Both sides continue hostile accusations. Russia maintains it’s conducting an orderly withdrawal “in accordance with the international agreements (to their) previous (places) of deployment,” according to Col. Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy chief of Russia’s General Staff. US military officials at first said they saw no significant pullback. On August 22 with a clear withdrawal underway, the International Herald Tribune reported that the “US and France say Russia is not complying” with the cease fire.

Russia is observing a 1999 joint Russian-S. Ossetian-N. Ossetian-Georgian agreement prepared by the Joint Control Commission, an international South Ossetian monitoring body. It lets Russian troops secure a corridor five miles beyond either side of South Ossetia’s border that extends into Georgia. It also allows Russian peacekeepers to operate under the

auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

On August 23, RIA Novosti reported that Nogovitsyn said Russian forces will patrol Georgia's Black Sea Poti port as "envisaged in the international agreement. Poti is outside of the security zone," he said, "but that does not mean we will sit behind a fence watching them riding around in Hummers." Nor allow Georgia to rearm for more aggression as Russia suspects, and that Georgia's deputy defense minister, Batu Kutelia, admitted doing initially. On August 22, he told the Financial Times that his government attacked the S. Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, and attempted to seize it.

On August 22, Nogovitsyn heightened tensions by claiming Georgia is now preparing for new military action against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. "We have registered an increase in (Georgian) reconnaissance activities and preparations for armed actions in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone." As a result, he said that Russia reserves the right to maintain peacekeepers in both provinces. For its part, RIA Novosti reports that America now refuses to participate with Russia in "NATO's Operation Active Endeavour naval antiterrorism exercise," according to a Russian Black Sea Fleet source. The announcement came after Russia's NATO envoy, Dmitry Rogozin, said his country was "temporarily suspending military cooperation with NATO until a political decision on relations" between the two nations had been resolved.

Also on August 22, the Israeli Ynetnews.com published a Russian daily Kommersant interview with Washington's new Moscow ambassador, John Beyrle, sure to embarrass his superiors. He called Russia's response justified after its troops came under attack. "Now we see Russian forces which responded to attacks on Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, legitimately...." He went on to criticize Russia's over-reaction and warned about its impact on US - Russia relations as well as investor confidence. Nonetheless, his first comment is telling and quite contrary to everything from Washington and biting anti-Russian media responses.

Finally on August 23, Russia Today reported that the "local (S. Ossetian and Abkhazian) population (said) they fear Georgia might repeat its regional aggression. They also (want) Russian troops to stay in the area to shield them from any possible attacks." Russia has set up 18 S. Ossetia peacekeeping posts and plans a similar number in Abkhazia "to deter looters and the transportation of arms and ammunition."

All the News Not Fit to Print

Not a major media hint that Georgia is a US vassal state. That its military is an extension of the Pentagon. That its aggression was manufactured in Washington. That it's well-supplied and trained by America and Israel. That pipeline geopolitics is central. Beating up on Russia as well. Diverting Moscow from any planned intervention against Iran. Even enlisting Russia's cooperation - not to sell Iran sophisticated S-300 air defense missile systems and agreeing to tougher sanctions in return for perhaps Washington deferring on Georgian and Ukrainian NATO admission and recognizing S. Ossetian and Abkhazian independence. Perhaps more as well to put off greater confrontation for later under a new administration.

Clearly, however, the fuse is lit. It has been for some time. It relates to everything strategic about this vital area with its immense energy and other resources as well neutralizing Russia's power as America's top rival and key Eurasian competitor.

Controlling the region's oil and gas is crucial and what Michel Chossudovsky explains in his August 22 article titled: "The Eurasian Corridor: Pipeline Geopolitics and the New Cold War." He calls the Caucasus crisis "intimately related to the control over energy pipeline and transportation corridors (and cites) evidence that the Georgian (August 7) attack....was carefully planned (in) High level consultations (between) US and NATO officials" months in advance. On August 23, RIA Novosti said a Russian security source accused Georgia of involvement a year ago in "coordinat(ion) with NATO's plans to strengthen its (Black Sea) naval presence."

Chossudovsky discusses America's (1999) "Silk Road Strategy: The Trans-Eurasian Security System (as) an essential building block of (post-Cold War) US foreign policy." Proposed in House legislation but never enacted, it was for "an energy and transport corridor network linking Western Europe to Central Asia and eventually to the Far East." It aims to integrate South Caucasus and Central Asian nations "into the US sphere of influence." It involves "militariz(ing) the Eurasian corridor," much like Security and Prosperity Partnership plans are for North America.

Efforts are largely directed against Russia, China and Iran as well as other Eastern-allied states. It's to turn all Eurasia into a "free market" paradise, secure it for capital, assure US dominance, control its resources, exploit its people, transform all its nations into American vassals, and likely aim to dismantle Russia's huge landmass if that idea ever comes to fruition.

Russia, however, isn't standing idle and is partnered in two strategic alliances:

— the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since June 2001 along with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan with Iran in observer status. It defines its goals as: "good neighborly relations;" promoting "effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology" and more as well as "ensur(ing) peace, security and stability in the region." Given NATO's potential threat, its main purpose is military; and

— the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) since 2003 "in close liaison with the SCO" with a heavy emphasis on security against NATO Eurasian expansionism; its members include: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The stakes are huge as both sides prepare to confront them. All part of the new Cold War and Great Game. Reinventing the Evil Empire and beating up on Russia as part of it. Risking a potential nuclear confrontation as well and what a new US president will inherit with no assurance a Democrat will be any more able than a Republican. And with a global economic crisis unresolved, either one may resort to the age old strategy of stoking fear, going to war, hoping it will stimulate the economy, and be able to divert public concerns away from lost jobs, home foreclosures, and a whole array of other unaddressed issues.

In early 2003, it worked. Will 2009 be a repeat? Will it deepen what author Kevin Phillips calls "the global crisis of American capitalism?" Will the Doomsday Clock strike midnight? It moved two minutes closer on January 17, 2007 to five minutes to the hour. It cited 27,000 nuclear weapons, 2000 ready to launch in minutes. It said: "We stand at the brink of a second nuclear age. Not since....Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices." It said the situation is "dire." It called for immediate preventive action. Its message went unheeded, and conditions today have worsened. The high Eurasian stakes up things further, and neither side so far is blinking.

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