

Russia on the Defensive

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Global Research, February 07, 2009

7 February 2009

It's been only a short time since Obama assumed his post as the new President of the United States. Meanwhile, other contending powers monitored American developments, some anticipating some relief in alleviating the reckless policies unleashed by the Bush administration for the past couple years. Russia in particular remained cautiously optimistic and loosened its guard during the inception of the Obama Administration, entertaining an iota of hope that Obama could live up to the hype and elaborate show of promises by helping amend soured relations between both powers.

While Russia has agreed to cooperate with the United States on stabilizing Afghanistan, there's no doubt that there remain a few grievances and annoyances that have sharply topped Moscow's list. As a sign of good gesture, Russia reined in their deployment of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad under the condition that the U.S. would not push forth with their plans for the missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Many wonder: who in Poland or the Czech Republic wanted a missile shield in the first place? The short answer is: nobody except the U.S. Folks at Moscow were aware that the missile shield was more than just a fear-mongering deterrent against Iranian missiles, but its main incentive was to enforce the policies of Russian containment, another U.S. solipsist endeavor to fortify American hegemony next door. AfterDowningStreet.org reports that 31 Czech mayors in a petition to Obama warned that the shield would eventually foment a "new expansion of the arms race." An overwhelming majority of the Czech public rebelled against the idea with a hurried contest of protests from greens, communists, and anti-war activists alike, fearing that the shield would incite retaliatory measures from Russia and undeservedly place them in the midst of the crossfire.

Many have speculated that while the project has tumbled down the Obama administration's priority list, the missile shield may be a destined to become a flop due to overwhelming resistance and opposition. It remains to be seen though, and further developments wouldn't be pursued until Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama meet on April 2 in London during the G20 summit. Though it's a daring yet reckless venture started by Bush, the Obama administration has shown no signs of relenting.

However, in the meantime, this hasn't restrained Russia from taking other initiatives on countering American hegemony, nor have the buzzwords hope and change inhibited them from reasserting its dominance where it had always been preeminent. Russia knows it's being encircled: first the U.S.-backed Georgian assault on South Ossetia, second the proposed strategic annexation of Georgia and Ukraine into the NATO conglomerate, and third the recent proposal for a military surge in Afghanistan, an unending campaign which has no clear or foreseeable long-term objectives.

In return, what had Russia been up to in such a short span of time? Recalling a report from Reuters in December 2008, Russia flaunted plans to develop a new missile called the Bulava, “a submarine-launched missile that can carry nuclear warheads to targets more than 5000 miles away.” Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov admitted that “at the same time our defense enterprises have started mass production.” It was one of Russia’s grandstanding responses to the U.S. missile shield aside from the immediate proposal to install Iskanders in Kaliningrad in November.

On the first week of February, Telegraph UK reported that Belarus and Russia signed an agreement that would “create a joint force consisting of five Russian and Belarusian air force squadrons, and 10 missile batteries and radar facilities,” another initiative to counter the missile plans. It was a deal that echoed both countries’ deep-seated opposition to NATO expansion. Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko couldn’t refuse it, especially when sweetened with provisions for economic aid and discounted arms deals in exchange for the agreement.

In another move to restore the balance in Central Asia is the strengthening of the CSTO to collaborate on a rapid-response force. The CSTO is an alliance of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. While the declared purpose of the collective forces was to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and military aggression from radical armies or movements, the recent machination was more likely Russia’s undertaking to directly rival NATO and reinforce its presence in Central Asia, next door to Afghanistan and Pakistan where a huge clout of U.S. military occupancy is expected to surge.

The U.S. “respects” Georgian democracy and sovereignty — so they say — but it isn’t a surprise that there are likewise geopolitical incentives attached. The U.S. has a heavily vested interest in the oil and gas transportation routes from the Caspian basin to the West through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. The Georgian protectorate state as another American front for cloistering and isolating Russia won’t go away, and during the past few weeks, Russia has been busy consolidating land, sea, and air power in the Caucasus region by elevating military operations on the naval port of Ochamchire and reviving the former Soviet air base Bombora in Abkhazia, a move which that has alarmed Georgia and the European Union. Bombora was to play a part in the “deterrence or Georgia,” as reported by United Press International.

Even if the U.S. extended a hand in cooperation with Russia on the missile shield or various issues, it’s unlikely that both would come to a favorable agreement. Obama’s cabinet of war hawks doesn’t allude to anything promising, either. But now, the question remains with Obama, whether he would strip down Bush’s previous hardliner policies, giving not only the Russians, but NATO’s client states a sigh of relief, and whether Obama can ultimately live up to the hype of finally fostering positive relations with foreign nations regardless of his war cabinet. Would Obama endure change or play along with the elite and their agenda for geopolitical dominance eastward? Should he continue to pander to old forlorn ideologies, Russia would have no choice but to continually raise the stakes. The Russian victory during the South Ossetia war should’ve been more than a warning.

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