

Stoking Tensions, Risking Confrontation: A High Stakes US Gamble with Russia

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Prior to entering WW II, US strategists had a clear aim in mind at its conclusion – to hold unchallengeable power in a new post-war global system: military, economic and political in a “Grand Area” encompassing the West and Far East. Essentially most parts outside the communist bloc and exploiting it under disarming rhetoric like being “selfless advocates of freedom for colonial peoples (and an) enemy of imperialism.” Championing “world peace (also) through multinational control.”

Today, the facade is gone, and no pretense remains about much “grander” plans – over an “Area” comprising planet earth with “full spectrum dominance” over all land, surface and sub-surface sea, air, space, electromagnetic spectrum and information systems with enough overwhelming power to fight and win global wars against any potential challengers with all weapons in our arsenal, including nuclear and others of mass destruction.

One nation above others is an obstacle – Russia. It’s powerful and can’t be intimidated like most others. It’s also dominant where Washington wants control – the Eurasian vastness with its huge oil, gas and other resources. For years, American sought dominance over it. Saw an opening when the Soviet Union dissolved. And one way or other seeks to get it. Russia has other plans, so therein lies the root of the current conflict using Georgia as a US proxy to instigate it.

Beating up on Russia is now fair game. Moscow, for its part, won’t back off, so clear lines are drawn for protracted confrontation in a very high risk gamble for both sides. Russia prefers diplomacy to conflict and seeks alliances with the West and its neighbors. America wants conquest, and look at the stakes. An area from roughly Germany in the West to the Pacific rim. Encompassing Russia, China, the Middle East, and Asian sub-continent. Including about three-fourths of the world’s population and an equal amount of its energy resources. Most of its physical wealth overall and its GDP. No small prize, and America intends to secure it. Russia stands in the way. It controls its own part and influences much of the rest. Welcome to the new Cold War and new Great Game.

It’s only round one, but its roots go back to earlier US efforts to ally with former Soviet Republics. Encircle Russia with military bases and station offensive missiles and advanced tracking radar on its borders. Then Georgia attacked South Ossetia on August 7. Washington orchestrated the aggression. Russia counterattacked after artillery fire killed 15 or more of its peacekeepers, and partially destroyed their headquarters. The entire Tskhinvali capital as well, a civilian target of no military consequence. Border villages were burnt to the ground. Atrocities committed. Malicious attacks against non-combatants. Western media portrayed the aggressor as victim. The same game it always plays – so far with faint letup,

save for the heavy Democrat and Republican conventions coverage getting top billing.

The Caucasus (hot) conflict has now ebbed. Russia controls things on the ground. In full compliance with the Sarkozy-brokered peace, according to Foreign Minister Lavrov. All six points of its original version. They include:

- renouncing the use of force;
- halting all military action;
- providing free access for humanitarian aid;
- the return of Georgian forces to their bases;
- Russian forces to their pre-conflict positions; and
- engaging in international discussions on South Ossetian and Abkhazian future status to ensure their security.

Afterwards, Georgian president Saakashvili reneged by unilaterally amending the original agreement. It bears no relation to what Moscow signed. A deliberately confrontational act. Surely directed from Washington. Sharp western criticism followed and ignited the old Cold War blame the Russians game that both surprised and angered the Kremlin.

Its leadership isn't about to roll over. On August 26, it backed South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence and their protection from further Georgian aggression. The populations of both provinces overwhelmingly approve. On August 27, Georgia, in response, withdrew all but two lower level officials from Moscow. On August 29, its parliament supported a resolution to sever diplomatic relations and cancel agreements allowing Russian peacekeepers to remain in both provinces. Russian State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Head, Konstantin Kosachev, called the action "regrettable" but said its impact on Russia won't be negative. Until August 29, Russia retained its full Tbilisi staff and said maintaining ties are vital.

According to The New York Times on August 29, that's now changed after Georgia made it official - breaking diplomatic ties with Russia and Moscow responding in kind. Both countries will retain their consular offices but further political relations will be handled by intermediaries. The move doesn't prevent both countries' officials from meeting in neutral territory.

On August 30, RIA Novosti reported two other developments as well. According to Georgia's reintegration minister, Temur Yakobashvili, that Tbilisi "was formally pulling out of a (May 14) 1994 UN-approved (Abkhazia and Georgia) agreement....on a ceasefire and separation of forces." It followed Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Earlier on August 12, Georgian president Saakashvili announced that his country was withdrawing from the Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose alliance of former Soviet republics.

RIA Novosti's other report was a slap in the face to Georgia. That the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has evidence about "numerous wrong decisions" Georgian leaders made leading up to the Caucasus crisis - according to the German magazine Der Spiegel. It cited "detailed (Georgian) planning to move into South Ossetia"

and backed Russian claims that “the Georgian offensive was already in full swing by the time Russian troops and armored vehicles entered the Roksky Tunnel (bordering Russia and South Ossetia) to protect its peacekeepers and the civilian population.” OSCE’s report went further as well citing “suspected war crimes committed by Georgians, who ordered attacks on sleeping South Ossetian civilians.”

On August 29, Russia Today reported that South Ossetia’s acting parliament chairman, Tarzan Kokoity, announced a deal to host Russian military bases as early as September 2. In addition, two others may be reactivated on their former Abkhazian sites. However, on the same date, the online service also said that Russian Foreign Ministry officials denied such a deal. Only that Russia is “currently working on a cooperation (arrangement) with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it’s too early to assess where this may lead.” An agreement is expected to be signed on September 2.

Diplomatic jousting continues as EU leaders weigh further responses and their relations with Russia going forward. For its part, Russia is in no mood to stand idle and is surely mindful of Barak Obama’s convention speech threat to “curb Russian aggression.”

Heated Rhetoric Instead of Hot Conflict

A war of words replaced hot conflict on the ground. Unfair condemnation and heated rhetoric. Western nations on board with Washington. Some like the UK more than others. The corporate media trumpeting approval. Spewing venom and agitprop. Their specialty and what they’re good at. Keeping their audiences uninformed. Their accustomed role. No longer even pretending to report legitimately.

For his part, President Medvedev stood firm and said: “We are not afraid of anything, including the prospect of a new Cold War, but we don’t want one, and in this situation everything depends on the positions of our partners.”

In New York Times and UK Financial Times August 26 op-eds, he explained his decision to sign Decrees to recognize South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence and “call(ed) on other states to follow (his) example.” Seeing early warning signs, he tried to dissuade Georgia from using force. He called Georgian president Saakashvili a “madman” for “tak(ing) such a gamble.” He explained that Russia had no other option than to respond. To save lives “not in a war of our choice. We have no designs on Georgian territory.”

Russia struck bases from which attacks were “launched and then left. We restored the peace but could not calm the fears and aspirations of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples.” To aid them and the requests of their presidents, “I signed a decree” to recognize their independence.” He also referred to Russia’s “historic friendship and sympathy” for Georgians and said he hopes “one day (they will) have leaders they deserve, who care about their country and who develop mutually respectful relations with all the peoples in the Caucasus. Russia is ready to support the achievement of such a goal.”

On August 31, Itar Tass reported that Medvedev “spell(ed) out five principles of Russian foreign policy in a televised interview:

- the supremacy of international legal fundamentals that define relations between civilized nations;
- the importance of a multi-polar world – not one in which one nation decides for all others;

— confrontation with no other country, and Russia will work toward “friendly relations with Europe, the United States and other countries of the world;”

— an “absolute priority” of protecting life and dignity of Russian citizens “no matter where they live....aggression will be deterred; and

— like other countries, “Russia has areas of privileged interests....countries to which we are linked with friendly ties,” and not only with neighboring states.

Medvedev added that diplomatic relations going forward would depend not just on Russia but also “on our friends, partners and the international community at large. They have a choice.”

On August 28, Prime Minister Putin had his say. Was outspoken in a CNN interview, and accused the Bush administration of failing to keep Georgia from attacking South Ossetia. This, he said, damaged bilateral relations. He suggested a possible darker motive as well: “...that someone in the United States created this conflict on purpose to stir up the situation and create an advantage for one of the (presidential) candidates. They needed a small victorious war” – a clear reference to John McCain although he didn’t say.

He also said “not only (did the administration fail) to restrain the Georgian leadership from this criminal action, but the American side in fact trained and equipped the Georgian army....We (also) have serious reasons to believe that directly in the combat zone citizens of the United States were present. If the facts are confirmed....that means only one thing – that they could be there on the direct instruction of their leadership....following a direct order from their leader, and not on their own initiative.” Col. General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, Russia’s deputy chief of general staff, said Russian forces had a US passport for Michael Lee White of Texas in a ruined building near Tskhinvali and showed what was found.

Putin stressed that Russia would respond to the killing of its citizens and peacekeepers and wouldn’t let possible G-8 membership expulsion or threatened EU actions deter it.

With this going on, heavily armed US and other NATO warships entered the Black Sea on the pretext of delivering humanitarian aid. Nogovitsyn called it a task for merchant ships. Suggested it further heightens tensions and said: “I don’t think such a buildup will foster the stabilization of the atmosphere in the region.” Other Russian military officials called the intrusion provocative and accused Washington of shipping new arms supplies.

On August 27, Reuters reported US General and NATO commander John Craddock’s comments on a recent Tbilisi visit. He said Washington will likely provide military aid, and an anonymous US official confirmed that a US – Georgia dialogue is ongoing about replenishing the country’s losses. Possibly also sending sophisticated weapons like Stinger antiaircraft missiles and portable antitank ones called Javelins. Training as well.

On August 27, the Jerusalem-based DEBKAFfile reported that Captain Igor Dygalo, Russian Navy’s deputy commander, said the Moskva missile cruiser would carry out a Black Sea naval exercise in response – a clear sign that Moscow intends to assert control and may interfere with 10 more encroaching Western vessels. According to Nogovitsyn: two American, four Turkish, and the others German, Polish and Spanish.

He also said NATO exhausted its Black Sea complement under international agreements and

warned against sending more. DEBKAFfile sources say 16 to 18 are planned, including the USS Mount Whitney, “one of the most advanced warships in the world.” If true, this will heighten tensions further.

On August 29, DEBKAFfile cited a Moscow media quote from former Russian Black Sea Fleet commander, Admiral Eduard Baltin, saying: “Despite the apparent strength of the NATO naval group in the Black Sea....a single salvo from the Moskva missile cruiser and two or three missile boats would be enough to annihilate the entire group. Within 20 minutes, the waters would be clear.” He added that Russia “will not strike first....”

At the same time, Russian president Medvedev warned Moldova not to repeat Georgia’s mistake by using force against Transdnistria. Russian peacekeepers have been on the ground there since 1990 after separatists broke away and established an independent republic. Under international law, it’s more justifiable than Kosovo, but thus far with no outside recognition. Moldova is strategically located on the Black Sea’s Western shore – close to the Crimean Peninsula and Russia’s large Sevastopol, Ukraine naval headquarters.

On August 27, Ukraine upped the stakes and demanded Russia renegotiate its lease – good until 2017. A higher rental payment was asked, and (according to Russia Today) a new law was passed demanding 72 hours notice each time Russia’s fleet leaves the base. It covers air traffic as well and asks for personnel involved, time of departure, and destination. Russia says the law violates its 1997 Moscow – Kiev agreement, so it’s unclear if Ukraine will back down. Russia is in no mood to with Georgia on its mind and watching Washington behind the scenes orchestrating mischief.

Earlier on August 24, Russia’s Navy chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, said its Black Sea Fleet now commands its Mediterranean ships as well. It came as the US carrier Iwo Jima (six-vessel) Expeditionary Strike Group heads for the region to link up with other US vessels, and Russia announced it will search all cargo transiting Georgia’s Poti port that it controls. Thus far, Washington avoided confrontation by redirecting its warships to Georgian-controlled Batumi. An event duly noted in Moscow that responded by anchoring three missile boats and the Moskva missile cruiser at the Black Sea Sukhumi port.

The cat and mouse game continues, and it’s not eased if South Ossetian reports are true. They claim Georgia is deploying military forces on its border, and (late last week) overnight firing on villages was heard. Georgia says Russia wants to annex its territory. Moscow asserts its right to protect South Ossetian and Abkhazian residents from made-in-Washington aggression – many of whom hold Russian passports. Tensions continue to escalate causing some analysts to say war is inevitable, and under a US neocon administration might involve a “proactive” nuclear strike.

An August 28 DEBKAFfile report suggested that Russia takes this threat seriously. It headlined: “Russia successfully tests ICBM designed to beat anti-missile systems,” according to Alexander Vovk, spokesman for Russia’s strategic nuclear forces. He referred to the Topol RS-12M to be used against ground-based missiles and capable of “beating” any US “missile shield.” The test followed Russia warning NATO against sending additional ships to the Black Sea that will only heighten tensions.

On August 28, RIA Novosti reported an escalation, a sign still more will follow – South Ossetian Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzayev stating that an unmanned Georgian reconnaissance plane was shot down over the capital, Tskhinvali at 20.10 GMT. He also said

“several illegal armed groups were operating near the capital under orders from Georgian authorities to conduct subversive activities and terrorist acts.” South Ossetian security forces formed “counter-terrorist units” to respond. On August 27, Col. General Nogovitsyn said a Georgian reconnaissance drone overflew South Ossetia at 11.15 GMT – spying in violation of existing agreements. A frequent practice prior to Georgia’s August 7 aggression so it happening again is worrisome.

In an August 28 Russian newspaper, *Vremya Novostei*, interview, Russia’s NATO ambassador, Dmitry Rogozin, warned that any Organization Caucasus attack would “mean a declaration of war on Russia.” On August 27, *The New York Times* called him “a finger-wagging nationalist who hung a poster of Stalin in his new ambassadorial office....”

Rogozin named two world-changing dates of concern: “September 11, 2001 and August 8, 2008....basically identical in terms of significance” and that today heightens Russia’s fears about being surrounded by NATO. He calls the current crisis much more than “an ethnic spat between Georgia and South Ossetia.” Russians understand that Washington targets them, and a recent poll showed 74% of them believe “Georgia was a pawn of the United States.” Only 5% blamed Russia.

This at a time other reports hint at NATO divisions despite its outward appearance of toughness. The US, UK and most Eastern European states support harsh measures. In contrast, France, Germany, Portugal, Turkey and Italy are reluctant to break off Russian ties with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner telling *The New York Times* that “Russia is a great nation. Look how we have been treating it. We need firmness, not threats” that won’t work “because everyone knows we are not going to war.”

In another report, however, *RIA Novosti* indicated that “EU leaders (are) considering sanctions against Russia” after earlier averring they weren’t on the agenda. Russia heard nothing about them, and so far details aren’t forthcoming. Maybe no sanctions either and just verbal threats. Kouchner later confirmed that EU leaders will weigh them at an emergency September 1 summit. Convening in Brussels, they’ll discuss Western relations with Russia, Georgia, and providing aid to the former Soviet republic.

Precisely what Russia fears because it will come in the form of more arms and munitions. On September 1, *RIA Novosti* reported that “Russia wants (an) arms embargo on Georgia and quoted Foreign Minister Lavrov saying he wants one in place until Georgia has a new leader. One Russia can trust and not the current Washington tool.

In his remarks Lavrov said: “To guarantee the region is protected against new outbreaks of violence, Russia will continue to take measures to make sure the (Saakashvili) regime is unable to commit evil deeds ever again. It would be appropriate to impose an embargo on arms supplies on that regime until different leaders have turned Georgia into a normal country.” He then blamed Washington for its role in the conflict and added that he hoped EU leaders in Brussels would make “the right choice” at their summit.

Possibly so according to the August 30 – 31 *Wall Street Journal*’s weekend edition. It reported that “the EU isn’t expected to impose sanctions on Russia,” and the previous day suggested that “Russia mocked talk” about them. The *Journal* stressed how divided EU nations are but admitted they have “few tools to deter Moscow.” It quoted Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb saying: “My preference is to go carefully on concrete actions but to be sufficiently tough on the language. Whether or not we like it, Russia and Europe are

mutually interdependent.” And it’s likely other foreign ministers and EU leaders share that view.

Yet on August 27, BBC reported that UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband (in a Kiev, Ukraine speech) called on the EU and NATO to initiate “hard-headed engagement (and the) widest possible coalition” against Russia over Georgia along with other inflammatory comments. On August 31, UK prime minister Gordon Brown threatened a “root and branch” review of relations with Russia and accused Moscow of “aggression.”

So did Barak Obama, the official Democrat nominee, and also lashed out at Medvedev’s decree. He “condemn(ed) Russia’s decision and call(ed) upon all countries of the world not to accord (it) any legitimacy....” Said America should “further isolate Russia.” Provide Georgia \$1 billion in aid. Admit it to NATO. Deny Russia WTO membership. Disband the NATO – Russia Council, and even end Russia’s Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) membership.

In contrast, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan backed Russia’s action. Its role in restoring peace, and expressed “support for (Russia’s) active role in assisting peace and cooperation in the region.” However, they stopped short of endorsing South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence in their closing statement that “express(ed) their deep concern over the recent tensions surrounding the South Ossetia question and call(ed) for the sides to peacefully resolve existing problems through dialogue.”

That got the corporate media to distort their closing statement and like Reuters say “Medvedev failed to win crucial support from his Asian allies (for) Moscow’s confrontation with the West over war in Georgia.” The New York Times as well claimed that “China and four other (Asian) countries meeting with Russia for the annual (SCO) summit declined to back Russia’s military action in a joint communique.”

The Wall Street Journal echoed the same theme and then ranted about “strains” and “unease” in Russian – Chinese relations. Even hinted that Russia might be “isolated” because of its Georgian “aggression.” A word it only attributes to Russia in very hostile daily op-eds. More Journal commentary below, but first an alternative Russian view.

The Post-Communist PRAVDA On-Line

Established in January 1999, it’s editor is longtime Western journalist, Timothy Bancroft-Hinchey, who says “at this moment in time, I’m proud, very proud, to be writing for a Russian newspaper.” On August 29, 2008, his opinion piece titled “Abkhazia, Georgia, Kosovo, South Ossetia and something called international law” presented a different view from the dominant US media’s daily anti-Russian agitprop.

Straightaway aiming at George Bush and Secretary Rice he stated: They “follow the norm that laws are made to be disregarded, disrespected, ignored, manipulated or simply broken, which is patently obvious through the sheer hypocrisy of Washington’s position on the territorial integrity of Georgia.” From a “legal perspective,” Georgia was a signatory to Soviet Russia’s Constitution and bound by its provisions. One of them was “the voluntary dissolution of the Union and clause which states that minority groups (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) in other Republics (Georgia) had the statutory and constitutional right” to a (free and fair) referendum for independence.

Post-1991, Georgia broke the law by not holding them, “so just this fact makes a valid case for these two republics to decide for themselves” to be or not be part of Georgia. In addition, Moscow spent 17 years negotiating peace that aimed to satisfy Tbilisi and both breakaway provinces. Georgia’s response: “manipulation, insults, insolence” and the recent slaughter of Tskhinvali civilians. By its actions, “Georgia....blew out the candles lighting any path towards its territorial integrity.”

The right of South Ossetians and Abkhazians to independence is also fully justified under the UN Charter and customary international laws and norms – in contrast to Kosovo, an “integral part” of Serbia. “The question of Kosovo follows all the norms of international law regarding inviolability of frontiers whereas Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not. They have the legal right to independence. Kosovo never has, does not, and never will.”

But not according to George Bush’s idea “to draw lines on maps and screw up entire nations....in a civilised world, laws are made to be followed.” Modern states have no right to “base their diplomacy on illegality, boorishness, cajoling and bullying without one iota of legal fabric in their arguments....future generations (should) read these lines and judge for themselves who was right and who was wrong at this fundamental moment in the determination of the future of Mankind.”

Bashing Russia - A Different View from The Wall Street Journal on the Warpath

An August 28 Melik Kaylan op-ed is typical – headlined: “How the Georgian Conflict ‘Really’ Started.” His version (from Tbilisi) is that “Anybody who thinks that Moscow didn’t plan this invasion, that we in Georgia caused it gratuitously, is severely mistaken.” He heard it “personally” from president Saakashvili “in a late night (presidential palace) chat.” In contrast, “Russia’s version of events doesn’t jibe with the facts.” On the ground in Gori, he learned “how Russia has deployed a highly deliberate propaganda strategy. (They) made a big show of moving out in force (but) left behind a resonating threat (that) they could return at any moment. (They) flatten(ed) civilian streets in order to sow fear, drive out innocents and create massive refugee outflows.”

He gets his information right from Saakashvili and Georgia’s defense minister, so he knows it’s “accurate.” Direct quotes about Russia “planning an invasion for weeks, even months ahead of time.” Was able to once Putin “consolidate(d) power.” With the Beijing Olympics and US elections as distractions and before Georgia’s winter. A rather amateurish account and not up to the Journal’s agitprop standards.

On August 25, Max Boot did a better job in a piece headlined: “Eastern Europe Can Defend Itself.” He’s way to the right of most others, a senior Council on Foreign Relations fellow, and frequent Journal contributor.

He claims “Eastern Europeans are rightly alarmed about the brazenness and success of the Russian blitzkrieg into Georgia.” Worsened by Russian threats “to rain nuclear annihilation on Ukraine and Poland if they refuse to toe the Kremlin’s line.” Even NATO states “can take scant comfort.” Boot’s solution: “Russia’s neighbors should spend more on defense. We should supply them with more anti-aircraft weapons.” No mention of how defense contractors will benefit or the importance of that side of NATO membership.

Boot sees big potential if Eastern European states spend more of their GDP on weapons. Georgia (as a US vassal) is doing it, but not its neighbors. He cites an International Institute

of Strategic Studies report that only one regional state spends more than 2% of its GDP on defense - Bulgaria at 2.2%. Nor do they maintain large standing forces, yet they have millions of military aged men to draw on. Russia is the only exception with "more than a million soldiers under arms" and a growing post-Soviet defense budget - 2.5% of GDP or 8% of total spending according to an August 28 RIA Novosti report that says it's heading much higher.

Eastern European states should react, according to Boot - to "deter Russians from threatening them in the first place....They should double their military spending (and) the US can help." They should have "large reserves ready for fast call-up and plenty of 'defensive' weapons." Clearly Boot has key things in mind - tightening the screws on Russia. Surrounding it with adversarial states. Giving America a greater edge than is possible without them, and letting US defense contractors cash in on new business.

Senators Joe Lieberman and Lindsey Graham have that and more in mind in their August 26 Journal op-ed and begin with an inflammatory headline: "Russia's Aggression Is a Challenge to World Order." They both visited the region, met with the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine and Poland, and say that "Supporting Georgia is only the 'first' step toward safeguarding freedom in Europe."

They claim America strove for 60 years for "a Europe that is whole, free and at peace." One of "the greatest achievements of the 20th century." By their reasoning, "Russia's 'invasion' of Georgia represents the most serious challenge to this political order since Slobodan Milosevic unleashed the demons of ethnic nationalism in the Balkans."

Never mind their outlandish reversal of truth - about a US-led NATO aggression. Blaming Serbs for their own actions. Dismembering Yugoslavia, and falsely accusing Milosevic (in a Washington Post editorial, for example) of being "personally responsible for the most destructive conflict and most terrible atrocities recorded in Europe since World War II. Without Mr. Milosevic the Yugoslav wars wouldn't have happened."

At the time, Graham, a congressman, and Lieberman, a senator, both agreed. Now they claim "disturbing evidence (shows) Russia is already laying the groundwork to apply the same arguments used to justify its intervention in Georgia to other parts of its near abroad - most ominously in the Crimea." America's first priority is "to prevent the Kremlin from achieving its strategic objectives in Georgia....Also needed, immediately, is a joint commitment by the US and the European Union to fund large-scale, comprehensive reconstruction....in consultation with the World Bank, IMF, and other international authorities....and for the US Congress to support" it.

Rebuilding Georgia's security forces is part of it with heavy emphasis on "antiaircraft and antiarmor systems necessary to deter any renewed Russian aggression." Both senators want a "reinvigorated NATO" meaning an enlarged one and more heavily armed. "Missile defense (and) a new trans-Atlantic energy alliance" to counter Russia's "willing(ness) to use its oil and gas resources as a weapon...."

US v. Russia by their calculus. Western solidarity must stand firm. Teach the Kremlin a lesson that "forced fealty to Moscow will fail (and it's only a) question (of) how long until Russia's leaders rediscover this lesson from their own history." With a strong undertone that if Moscow won't come around on its own, a US-led alliance will force it.

Perhaps the (August 27) US Navy-announced five-day US - UK naval exercises in the Gulf hints to Russia as well as Iran. Called "Exercise Goalkeeper" in the Central and Southern Arabian Gulf, it's "to train across the spectrum of Maritime Security Operations (MSO)," according to the US Fifth Fleet press release. It began on August 24 and was scheduled for completion on August 31.

It focused on "command and control in locating and tracking specific vessels deemed to pose a threat to Coalition nations in the Gulf region. The exercise also allows Coalition teams to board the vessel and practice the procedures for handing them over to Coast Guard ships."

Counterterrorism and security measures are also mentioned - "to disrupt violent extremists' use of the maritime environment as a venue for attack or to transport personnel or weapons." Clearly Iran is the focus. It follows "Operation Brimstone" in the North Atlantic. Can also apply to Russia, and may be repeated at a future time in the Black Sea - "to increase the security and prosperity of the region by working together for a better future," according to US Naval Forces Central Command. Quite a different way than Iran and Russia see it.

But not Arthur Herman in an August 29 Wall Street Journal op-ed titled: "Russia and the New Axis of Evil." He claims "Russian tanks (are) now presiding over the dismemberment of....Georgia" and asks can the Bush administration "rise to the challenge Russia has chosen to pose to the Free World?" He refers to "democratic governments" in Iraq and Georgia "sandwiched between Iran and Russia, two of the most authoritarian governments in the world" and for good measure adds "Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez" that Russia is "arming" along with Iran.

He calls Iran "the principal threat to peace in Iraq (and) Mr. Chavez's links to the terrorist group FARC (threatening) neighboring Colombia." Iran, Georgia and Colombia "are battlegrounds in a new kind of international conflict that will define our geopolitical future. (It) pits the US and the West against an emerging axis of oil-rich dictatorships....working together to push back against the liberalizing trends of globalization (with) their prime objective (of) toppling or undermining neighboring, pro-Western democracies."

Russia is number one in his sights and allied with "Tehran's mullahs clearly aim to control access to every major source of fossil energy from the western end of the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea." Then add Chavez "hop(ing) for an oil and natural gas monopoly over (his) neighbors like pro-Chavez satellites Bolivia and Ecuador."

Herman puts this kind of material in books and here says "The West has to confront the oil-rich dictatorships, flush with cash, and bent on regional domination." What can the US and a new president do, he asks? He proposes a "broad strategy of targeted economic sanctions and multilateral diplomacy, backed by US military power...." Most important is "to secure democracy's vital new flanks (in) Iraq, Georgia and Colombia (to send) a clear signal that liberty, not tyranny, is the wave of the globalizing future." And for readers who believe that, consider moving to (or even visiting) one of his three favored countries.

Herman is typical of writers getting Wall Street Journal and other hard right op-ed space. He taught history at George Mason University. Also Georgetown and Catholic University and contributes to right wing publications like National Review and Commentary. As well as the Wall Street Journal. He also wrote a revisionist history of Joe McCarthy entitled: "Joseph

McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator." In it he claims that given the "communist threat" he got a bum rap even though he vilified innocent people, was a pathological liar, a consummate demagogue, and, according to David Halberstam knew how "to humiliate vulnerable, scared people (and) in the end produced little beyond fear and headlines."

Precisely what Herman and other hawkish writers now do to Russia, Iran, Venezuela and other independent countries unwilling to roll over for Washington. Even at the risk of a catastrophic global conflict no side can win and that all sides will end up paying for dearly.

Stephen Lendman is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization. He lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

Also visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com and listen to The Global Research News Hour on RepublicBroadcasting.org Mondays from 11AM - 1PM US Central time for cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests. All programs are archived for easy listening.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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