

The Caucasus —Washington Risks nuclear war by miscalculation

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The dramatic military attack by the military of the Republic of Georgia on South Ossetia in the last days has brought the world one major step closer to the ultimate horror of the Cold War era—a thermonuclear war between Russia and the United States—by miscalculation. What is playing out in the Caucasus is being reported in US media in an alarmingly misleading light, making Moscow appear the lone aggressor. The question is whether George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are encouraging the unstable Georgian President, Mikhail Saakashvili in order to force the next US President to back the NATO military agenda of the Bush Doctrine. This time Washington may have badly misjudged the possibilities, as it did in Iraq, but this time with possible nuclear consequences.

The underlying issue, as I stressed in my July 12 Global Research article entitled [Georgia, Washington and Moscow: a Nuclear Geopolitical Poker Game](#), is the fact that since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 one after another former member as well as former states of the USSR have been coaxed and in many cases bribed with false promises by Washington into joining the counter organization, NATO.

Rather than initiate discussions after the 1991 dissolution of the Warsaw Pact about a systematic dissolution of NATO, Washington has systematically converted NATO into what can only be called the military vehicle of an American global imperial rule, linked by a network of military bases from Kosovo to Poland to Turkey to Iraq and Afghanistan. In 1999, former Warsaw Pact members Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic joined NATO. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia followed suit in March 2004. Now Washington is putting immense pressure on the EU members of NATO, especially Germany and France, that they vote in December to admit Georgia and Ukraine.

The roots of the conflict

The specific conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia has its roots in the following. First, the Southern Ossetes, who until 1990 formed an autonomous region of the Georgian Soviet republic, seek to unite in one state with their co-ethnics in North Ossetia, an autonomous republic of the Russian Soviet republic and now the Russian Federation. There is an historically grounded Ossete fear of violent Georgian nationalism and the experience of Georgian hatred of ethnic minorities under then Georgian leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia, which the Ossetes see again under Georgian President, Mikhel Saakashvili. Saakashvili was brought to power with US financing and US covert regime change activities in December 2003 in what was called the Rose Revolution. Now the thorns of that rose are causing blood

to spill.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia—the first a traditional Black Sea resort area, the second an impoverished, sparsely populated region that borders Russia to the north—each has its own language, culture, history. When the Soviet Union collapsed, both regions sought to separate themselves from Georgia in bloody conflicts – South Ossetia in 1990-1, Abkhazia in 1992-4.

In December 1990 Georgia under Gamsakhurdia sent troops into South Ossetia after the region declared its own sovereignty. This Georgian move was defeated by Soviet Interior Ministry troops. Then Georgia declared abolition of the South Ossete autonomous region and its incorporation into Georgia proper. Both wars ended with cease-fires that were negotiated by Russia and policed by peacekeeping forces under the aegis of the recently established Commonwealth of Independent States. The situation hardened into “frozen conflicts,” like that over Cyprus. By late 2005, Georgia signed an agreement that it would not use force, and the Abkhaz would allow the gradual return of 200,000-plus ethnic Georgians who had fled the violence. But the agreement collapsed in early 2006, when Saakashvili sent troops to retake the Kodori Valley in Abkhazia. Since then Saakashvili has been escalating preparations for military action.

Critical is Russia’s support for the Southern Ossetes. Russia is unwilling to see Georgia join NATO. In addition, the Ossetes are the oldest Russian allies in the Caucasus who have provided troops to the Russian army in many wars. Russia does not wish to abandon them and the Abkhaz, and fuel yet more ethnic unrest among their compatriots in the Russian North Caucasus. In a November 2006 referendum, 99 percent of South Ossetians voted for independence from Georgia, at a time when most of them had long held Russian passports. This enabled Russian President Medvedev to justify his military’s counter-attack of Georgia on Friday as an effort to “protect the lives and dignity of Russian citizens, wherever they may be.”

For Russia, Ossetia has been an important strategic base near the Turkish and Iranian frontiers since the days of the czars. Georgia is also an important transit country for oil being pumped from the Caspian Sea to the Turkish port of Ceyhan and a potential base for Washington efforts to encircle Tehran.

As far as the Georgians are concerned, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are simply part of their national territory, to be recovered at all costs. Promises by NATO leaders to bring Georgia into the alliance, and ostentatious declarations of support from Washington, have emboldened Saakashvili to launch his military offensive against the two provinces, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Saakashvili and likely, Dick Cheney’s office in Washington appear to have miscalculated very badly. Russia has made it clear that it has no intention of ceding its support for South Ossetia or Abkhazia.

Proxy War

In March this year as Washington went ahead to recognize the independence of Kosovo in former Yugoslavia, making Kosovo a de facto NATO-run territory against the will of the UN Security Council and especially against Russian protest, Putin responded with Russian Duma hearings on recognition of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, a pro-Russian

breakaway republic in Moldova. Moscow argued that the West's logic on Kosovo should apply as well to these ethnic communities seeking to free themselves from the control of a hostile state. In mid-April, Mr. Putin held out the possibility of recognition for the breakaway republics. It was a geopolitical chess game in the strategic Caucasus for the highest stakes—the future of Russia itself.

Saakashvili called then-President Putin to demand he reverse the decision. He reminded Putin that the West had taken Georgia's side. This past April at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, US President Bush proposed accepting Georgia into NATO's "Action Plan for Membership," a precursor to NATO membership. To Washington's surprise, ten NATO member states refused to support his plan, including Germany, France and Italy.

They argued that accepting the Georgians was problematic, because of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were in reality saying that they would not be willing to back Georgia as, under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which mandates that an armed attack against any NATO member country must be considered an attack against them all and consequently requires use of collective armed force of all NATO members, it would mean that Europe could be faced with war against Russia over the tiny Caucasus Republic of Georgia, with its incalculable dictator, Saakashvili. That would mean the troubled Caucasus would be on a hair-trigger to detonate World War III.

Russia threatens Georgia, but Georgia threatens Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia looks like a crocodile to Georgia, but Georgia looks to Russia like the cats' paw of the West. Since Saakashvili took power in late 2003 the Pentagon has been in Georgia giving military aid and training. Not only are US military personnel active in Georgia today. According to an Israeli-intelligence source, **DEBKAFfile, in 2007, the Georgian President Saakashvili**

"commissioned from private Israeli security firms several hundred military advisers, estimated at up to 1,000, to train the Georgian armed forces in commando, air, sea, armored and artillery combat tactics. They also have been giving instruction on military intelligence and security for the central regime. Tbilisi also purchased weapons, intelligence and electronic warfare systems from Israel. These advisers were undoubtedly deeply involved in the Georgian army's preparations to conquer the South Ossetian capital Friday."

Debkafile reported further, "Moscow has repeatedly demanded that Jerusalem halt its military assistance to Georgia, finally threatening a crisis in bilateral relations. Israel responded by saying that the only assistance rendered Tbilisi was 'defensive.'" The Israeli news source added that Israel's interest in Georgia has to do as well with Caspian oil pipeline geopolitics. "Jerusalem has a strong interest in having Caspian oil and gas pipelines reach the Turkish terminal port of Ceyhan, rather than the Russian network. Intense negotiations are afoot between Israel Turkey, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Azarbaijan for pipelines to reach Turkey and thence to Israel's oil terminal at Ashkelon and on to its Red Sea port of Eilat. From there, supertankers can carry the gas and oil to the Far East through the Indian Ocean."

This means that the attack on South Ossetia is the first battle in a new proxy warfare between Anglo-American-Israeli led interests and Russia. The only question is whether Washington miscalculated the swiftness and intensity of the Russian response to the Georgian attacks of 8.8.08.

So far, each step in the Caucasus drama has put the conflict on a yet higher plane of danger. The next step will no longer be just about the Caucasus, or even Europe. In 1914 it was the “Guns of August” that initiated the Great War. This time the Guns of August 2008 could be the detonator of World War III and a nuclear holocaust of unspeakable horror.

Nuclear Primacy: the larger strategic danger

Most in the West are unaware how dangerous the conflict over two tiny provinces in a remote part of Eurasia has become. What is left out of most all media coverage is the strategic military security context of the Caucasus dispute.

Since the end of the Cold War in the beginning of the 1990’s NATO and most directly Washington have systematically pursued what military strategists call Nuclear Primacy. Put simply, if one of two opposing nuclear powers is able to first develop an operational anti-missile defense, even primitive, that can dramatically weaken a potential counter-strike by the opposing side’s nuclear arsenal, the side with missile defense has “won” the nuclear war.

As mad as this sounds, it has been explicit Pentagon policy through the last three Presidents from father Bush in 1990, to Clinton and most aggressively, George W. Bush. This is the issue where Russia has drawn a deep line in the sand, understandably so. The forceful US effort to push Georgia as well as Ukraine into NATO would present Russia with the spectre of NATO literally coming to its doorstep, a military threat that is aggressive in the extreme, and untenable for Russian national security.

This is what gives the seemingly obscure fight over two provinces the size of Luxemburg the potential to become the 1914 Sarajevo trigger to a new nuclear war by miscalculation. The trigger for such a war is not Georgia’s right to annex South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Rather, it is US insistence on pushing NATO and its missile defense right up to Russia’s door.

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