U.S. hidden hand pushes Ossetia war

By Sara Flounders
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Aug. 13—Long before Aug. 8, when the leaders of Georgia, a country in the Caucasus Mountains south of Russia, attacked a small autonomous region known as South Ossetia, the U.S. military was deeply involved in Georgia. Washington is no innocent bystander in this bloody struggle, which provoked a response by Russia that now dominates the news. Georgia's well-organized and massive military assault set the city of Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital, aflame within hours, destroying the parliament building, the university and the main hospital. According to AP interviews with survivors, there was hardly a single building left undamaged. Eduard Kokoity, the South Ossetian leader, estimated that more than 1,400 civilians were killed in the assault. (Reuters, Aug. 8)

Russian military forces then struck back at Georgia's military bases, airfields and the main Black Sea port of Poti. Most news coverage in the West, however, is slanted to give the impression that Russia initiated the conflict with Georgia.

Many of the hundreds of recent articles detail the significance of Georgia as a strategic transit point for oil and gas from the Caspian Sea. But what connection this conflict may have to other U.S. maneuvers in this strategic region is barely mentioned.

Even as Russia is preoccupied with a war on its border and world attention is focused on South Ossetia, the Bush administration has sent two additional U.S. Navy carrier groups to the seas around Iran.

U.S. armed, trained Georgia's army

Washington does not claim credit for the invasion of South Ossetia ordered by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, especially now that his forces have been routed. The roads back to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi are littered with tanks and other military vehicles abandoned by Georgian soldiers in their mad scramble to return home. (BBC News, Aug. 12)

But at the time of the invasion, the White House made clear its political support for Saakashvili and Georgia has been closely allied with the U.S. military in its war in Iraq. The U.S. and NATO have heavily armed and trained the Georgian military. There are U.S. military "advisers" in Georgia today. A thousand U.S. Marines from the Third Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment just finished three weeks of joint maneuvers there called "Operation Immediate Response."

In the period leading up to Georgia's attack on South Ossetia, the Pentagon had supplied Georgia with hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, artillery weapons, rocket launchers and dozens of combat helicopters and anti-aircraft missile systems. Hundreds of other weapons systems have poured in from other NATO members and from Israel. (Interfax, Aug. 7)

In exchange Georgia had provided the third-largest military force in the U.S. occupation of Iraq. But on Aug. 10 the U.S. began ferrying the 2,000 Georgian troops out of Iraq to the war zone in Georgia.

Along with the "advisers" and U.S. troops sent for maneuvers, U.S.-origin mercenaries and privatized military trainers function in Georgia. Tens of thousands of "civil society" operatives, international consultants, policy experts and technical assistants operate in Georgia, Ukraine and other former Soviet Republics.

NATO divided over Georgia

NATO, a U.S.-dominated alliance of imperialist military powers, has been divided over Washington's demands for expansion. The April 2-4 NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, nearly broke up over Washington's provocative proposals.

The U.S. demanded further expansion of NATO eastward to include Ukraine and Georgia, two countries that were once part of the Soviet Union and that both border Russia. Despite deep popular opposition in Poland and the Czech Republic, the U.S. military also pushed ahead with a plan to place a U.S. anti-missile system in each of these two countries, raising another threat to Russia.

At the Bucharest meeting, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg strongly and openly opposed Bush's demands to include Ukraine and Georgia in NATO. Some of these governments said they felt apprehensive about U.S. recognition of Kosovo's secession from Serbia. This secession was in direct violation of United Nations agreements and even the conditions the U.S. imposed on Serbia in the cease-fire agreement in 1999, which ended NATO's terror bombing of Yugoslavia. NATO postponed its decision on the status of Georgia and Ukraine until December. But Washington has refused to wait until the December NATO meeting. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Georgia on July 10 and strongly reiterated U.S. support for Georgia's membership in NATO.

NATO expansion

For 40 years the NATO military alliance was comprised of wealthy, industrialized imperialist countries that had prospered from generations of colonial plunder. It was essentially an anti-Soviet alliance to halt the spread of socialist revolutions in Europe. NATO used military might, nuclear blackmail, economic sabotage, espionage and terror to protect and expand the private corporate wealth of its members.

Using the 1992-1999 war against Yugoslavia to justify its expansion and intervention, NATO has now grown from 16 members before that war to 26 members and 38 nations in four different "partnership" arrangements, as Canadian Gen. Ray Henault of the NATO Military Committee boasted in his Chairman's Report in April. NATO has spread its field of intervention far beyond its original North Atlantic area to Eastern Europe, Africa and Afghanistan.

Many of the new members and "partners" of this military bloc are former socialist countries from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that have become captured ministates—economic colonies of European and U.S. imperialism.

However, the reestablishment of capitalist private ownership over the resources and

production of this vast region of the globe did not pacify U.S. imperialism, which sees competing capitalist development in Russia also as a threat. U.S. corporate power is determined to allow only dependent colonial subjects. Any country seeking to control its own development or resources, regardless of its social system, is targeted. This is as true for Russia as it is for Iran, China or Venezuela.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. corporate power has attempted to establish control over the vast energy resources of Central Asia and the nations of the Caucasus region, the Caspian Sea and Black Sea.

Through NATO's military expansion, the Pentagon has sought to encircle Russia. Again and again U.S. corporations have used Washington's intelligence agencies and U.S.-based, corporate-funded nongovernmental organizations to cynically manipulate national antagonisms, tensions and claims throughout Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet Republics.

Ossetia's status

For 70 years South Ossetia, though bordered on three sides by Georgia, held the status of an Autonomous Oblast (Region) within the Soviet Federation. Its population is 70,000. The neighboring Republic of North Ossetia-Alania has maintained its status as an autonomous republic within the present-day Russian Federation. The Ossetians have a distinct Persian-related language and culture. Schools, publishing houses and theaters helped preserve Ossetian nationality within the Soviet Union.

With the collapse of socialist planning in the Soviet Union, socialist solidarity among its constituent nations broke down. The capitalist market brought chaos and upheaval that hit hardest at the many small nationalities as the Soviet Union ended. Contending gangs of privatizers seeking to grab hold of nationally owned property fueled and manipulated nationalist sentiment.

The reactionary, pro-capitalist leadership in Georgia suddenly abolished South Ossetia's autonomous status and rights and annexed the small nation, as they did with Abkhazia, another small, autonomous nation strategically located on the Black Sea and surrounded by Georgia. In the resulting struggle, South Ossetia and Abkhazia each declared their independence from Georgia in 1991.

This led to a 17-year standoff, with both Georgian and Russian "peacekeepers" stationed in South Ossetia. The latest Georgian attack ended the standoff with a de facto attempt at annexation.

Abkhazia has similarly declared its independence from Georgia. Georgia's military onslaught against South Ossetia could well have spilled over into an attack on Abkhazia. Given the scope of the operation and the active influence of U.S. forces in Georgia, it is hard to believe that Washington could have been uninformed of Saakashvili's decision to launch an all-out war against South Ossetia.

Within the United Nations Security Council, U.S. and British representatives blocked a Russian-drafted resolution calling on Georgia and South Ossetia to immediately put down their weapons. The U.S. rejected the three-sentence statement that would have required both sides "to renounce the use of force." It was a clear confirmation of U.S. support for

Georgia's continued "use of force" against the small Ossetian nationality. However, Russia succeeded in repelling Georgia's invasion of South Ossetia. So as of Aug. 13, Georgia and Russia agreed to a "peace plan" brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Saakashvili is already criticizing the West generally, and the Bush administration in particular, for not coming to his aid—indicating that this puppet of Washington, who spent his time as a New York lawyer before being set up as a politician in post-Soviet Georgia, may believe he had the go-ahead from his imperialist masters to carry out a reckless attack on both Russians and Ossetians in the small autonomous region.

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