

U.S. Prepares Georgia for New Wars in Caucasus and Iran

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U.S. Marines at the Vaziani Training Area last year

On January 30 President Barack Obama met with his Georgian counterpart Mikheil Saakashvili in the Oval Office at the White House for an unprecedented private meeting between the heads of state, a tête-à-tête initiated by Washington.

Details of the discussions were not divulged, though Obama is reported to have confirmed American support for Georgia's full integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and expressed appreciation for Saakashvili almost doubling his nation's troop strength in NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan to approximately 1,700 soldiers, making the Georgian contingent the largest of any non-NATO member even as other troop contributing nations are planning to withdraw troops from the over ten-year war in South Asia.

Speculation emerged before the meeting that Obama had summoned the ambitious and erratic Georgian leader to Washington to propose a quid pro quo: The use of Georgian territory for American attacks on Iran in exchange for the U.S. exercising its not inconsiderable influence in Georgia - with a population of only 4.7 million the third largest recipient of American foreign aid - to assist in securing Saakashvili's reelection in next year's presidential poll.

Former president Eduard Shevardnadze, who was overthrown by Saakashvili's self-styled Rose Revolution in 2003 (after which the usurper won over 97 percent of the vote in a

dubious special presidential election in January 2004, the near-unanimous result not bothering the U.S. and other NATO nations in the least), was quoted a week before the Obama-Saakashvili meeting as warning, "I don't rule out that to retain the [presidential] chair Saakashvili may join a military campaign against Iran, which would become a catastrophe for our country."

Georgian analysts and opposition party leaders seconded Shevardnadze's suspicions, specifying that the Saakashvili regime would provide air bases and hospitals, of which a veritable proliferation have appeared in recent months, for such a war effort. A Georgian opposition analyst estimated that 30 new 20-bed hospitals and medical clinics were opened last December and that new air and naval sites are being built and modernized, military air fields in Vaziani, Marneuli and Batumi most ominously.

The U.S. launched a train and equip program for the Georgian armed forces over a decade ago, initially staffed by Green Berets but shortly thereafter and to this day by the U.S. Marine Corps, which has refashioned the nation's military into an expeditionary force for American and NATO wars around the world and in the process (and by design) a combat-trained and -ready force prepared for invading and subjugating neighboring Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which had been part of former Soviet Georgia but never of the Republic of Georgia) and for the inevitable war with Russia which would result from the attempt. The constantly-upgraded Krtsanisi National Training Center and the Vaziani Military Base outside Georgia's capital are staffed by U.S. and NATO as well as national military personnel.

During the five-day war between Georgia and Russia in August of 2008 which ensued after Tbilisi invaded South Ossetia days after U.S. airborne and Marine forces led a NATO Partnership for Peace exercise, Immediate Response 2008, in Georgia, American military transport planes returned the 2,000 Georgian troops stationed in Iraq – at the time the third largest foreign military contingent in the country, only exceeded by those of the U.S. and Britain – for the war with Russia.

Had the Georgian assault against South Ossetia, timed to coincide with the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing while the world's attention was focused there, succeeded in driving to the Roki tunnel which connects South Ossetia with Russia and thereby blocking reinforcements to repel the Georgian attack, the next target was to be Abkhazia, where Saakashvili had massed 8,000 troops near the Kodori Gorge on the Abkhaz side of the border.

Novosti quoted former Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, retired Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov two weeks after the war ended claiming: "In the operation the West conducted on Georgian soil against Russia – South Ossetians were the victims or hostages of it – we can see a rehearsal for an attack on Iran. There are a great deal of 'new features' that today are being fine tuned in the theater of military operations."

A month after the Georgian-Russian war ended then-Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin held a news conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels and, as quoted by Novosti, maintained that:

"Russian intelligence had obtained information indicating that the Georgian military infrastructure could be used for logistical support of U.S. troops if they launched an attack on Iran.

“‘This is another reason why Washington values Saakashvili’s regime so highly,’ Rogozin said, adding that the United States had already started ‘active military preparations on Georgia’s territory’ for an invasion of Iran.

“‘Georgia’s president is ready to make his nation a virtual hostage of a risky military gamble,’ he said.”

A United Press International dispatch at the time revealed that “a secret agreement between Georgia and Israel had earmarked two military airfields in the south of Georgia for use by Israeli fighter-bombers in a potential pre-emptive strike against Iran.”

According to journalist Atul Aneja in The Hindu in October of 2008:

“Russia’s military assertion in Georgia and a show of strength in parts of West Asia [the Middle East]...appear to have forestalled the chances of an immediate strike against Iran.

“Following Russia’s movement into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged that Moscow was aware that serious plans to attack Iran had been laid out. ‘We know that certain players are planning an attack against Iran. But we oppose any unilateral step and [a] military solution to the nuclear crisis,’ he said at the Valdai Discussion Club, an annual forum of opinion-makers in Moscow.

“Russia’s confrontation with Georgia appeared to be partly responsible for Moscow’s perception that an attack on Iran was in the works.

“It is now acknowledged that Russia seized control of two airfields in Georgia from where air strikes against Iran were being planned.

“The Russian forces also apparently recovered weapons and Israeli spy drones that would have been useful for the surveillance of possible Iranian targets.”

As the U.S. and its NATO allies escalate their military presence in the Persian Gulf – the U.S. has two carrier strike groups in the area and a third on its way – Washington is consolidating military ties with Georgia to a new level.

The U.S. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 passed in December calls for supplying new “defensive” arms to Georgia, with emphasis on air defense and anti-tank weapons. And perhaps more. Much more.

Last month Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned that his country will target missiles stationed in Georgia as part of the U.S.-NATO interceptor missile system.

The Georgian government approved its latest Annual National Program with NATO slightly over a week ago. The Annual National program was launched by the Western military alliance shortly after the 2008 war.

At the same time General John R. Allen, commander of all NATO and American troops in Afghanistan, visited Georgia to meet with senior military and government officials.

After his meeting with Obama in the White House, Saakashvili visited with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, leading members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (which, along with the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, functions as the main pro-

Saakashvili Georgian lobbying group in the government), Central Intelligence Agency Director David Petraeus and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta at the Pentagon, from which he was flown on a V-22 Osprey military aircraft to the United States Naval Academy (USNA) in Annapolis, where he was greeted with a 21-gun salute.

This week Georgian Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia announced the imminent arrival of a delegation of American military experts, asserting U.S.-Georgia military relations were entering "an entirely new phase." One that, as he elaborated, now extends beyond the U.S. Marine Corps training Georgian troops for Iraq and Afghanistan and to future prospective joint operations against nations like Iran.

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