

Will NATO's Expansion Bubble Burst?

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U.S. imperialism's every effort to assert itself and reverse its declining global domination confirms its weakened position. Washington increasingly looks to threats of sanctions and/or military attack to resolve its every problem and challenge. But the Bush administration finds it more difficult to line up its imperialist allies for each new aggression. Even some U.S. puppet and client states now try to distance themselves from U.S. initiatives.

Every major capitalist U.S. competitor looks first to its own economic interests. Their calculations are that the U.S. has lost its competitive economic position, with its financial institutions in crisis and a weakening of the entire capitalist system. The overcommitted U.S. military machine is bogged down in disastrous occupations, facing long-term resistance movements.

This weakened U.S. position was never more obvious than during Vice-President Dick Cheney's early September visit to Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. It was confirmed when NATO members sidestepped U.S. demands to impose sanctions on Russia after Georgia's Aug. 7 invasion of South Ossetia and Russia's counterattack. Imperialist NATO members Germany, France and Italy politely put on hold the U.S. push to include Georgia and Ukraine in the U.S.-commanded NATO alliance.

The European imperialists need the oil and gas from Russia to fuel their own industries. They also want to protect their own corporate investments in Russia more than they want to back up a crumbling U.S. position.

Militarism-the only option

Cheney visited Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan in Washington's effort to ratchet up military threats against Russia and to show U.S. determination to control this strategic region on Russia's border. As he visited, 18 NATO war ships, equipped with strategic weapons, including cruise missiles, appeared in the Black Sea off the coasts of Georgia and Russia. The USS Mount Whitney, flagship of the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet, docked on Sept. 6 at Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti, six miles from a Russian military base.

As Cheney visited, President George Bush announced \$1 billion in new aid to Georgia, describing it as a multi-year commitment. The U.S.-controlled International Monetary Fund will open access to another \$750 million in immediate aid to Georgia. Billions more of military aid are projected.

Simultaneous with NATO's aggressive stance in the Black Sea is expansion of U.S./NATO military raids and bombings in U.S.-ally Pakistan. This affront to Pakistan sovereignty has already enflamed anti-U.S. and anti-NATO sentiment. In a Sept. 16 statement, Pakistan

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani called for an immediate halt to U.S. incursions, adding that “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country would be safeguarded at all cost.”

NATO’s bombing of a village in Afghanistan killing more than 90—primarily Afghan children and civilians—has forced even the puppet Afghan regime to denounce the attack.

U.S. occupation forces in Iraq are still unable, after more than five years, to secure their bases or provide even the most basic services of potable water and electricity to a population that has overwhelmingly refused occupation.

In the midst of all this the U.S. threats and leaks on a possible military attack on Iran continue unabated. Half the U.S. Navy is in striking distance of Iran.

At the same time the U.S. has pushed ahead with a wild escalation—the plan to base anti-ballistic missiles in Poland and radar sites in the Czech Republic in the face of overwhelming popular opposition.

Escalating U.S. military threats worry the business interests of not only the imperialist allies in Western Europe. They have also led to a sharp confrontation with the emerging capitalist class in Russia.

This grouping acted earlier as if they would remain partners with U.S. imperialism in the long-term exploitation of the giant, once-socially-owned industries of the Soviet Union. They were totally compliant with the breakup of the USSR. Then they found to their chagrin that the imperialist pirates didn’t honor their agreements.

Many historical studies assert that in 1990 Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made the astounding capitulation that a united capitalist Germany could join NATO after Secretary of State Baker gave assurances that NATO would not extend its jurisdiction to the East. German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, Francois Mitterrand of France and John Major of Britain made similar promises.

U.S. imperialism has no room for capitalist partners who ultimately become capitalist rivals. Washington’s policy, stated explicitly in policy documents in the mid-1990s, was to transform NATO—a U.S.-commanded military alliance—to prevent socialist planning and ownership from reemerging and to assure that no new rival capitalist power in Russia or rival military bloc in Europe was established. U.S. military and corporate domination of the entire region was the goal.

NATO’s bombing, dismemberment and occupation of Yugoslavia from 1994 on set a precedent for the rapid expansion of NATO as a U.S.-dominated military alliance.

The new Russian capitalist class watched all the countries of Eastern Europe and many of the former Republics of the USSR turned into pawns used as anti-Russian military bases. Now Russian Prime Minister Putin is belatedly trying to assert some sovereignty over the vast, encircled country, greatly weakened since the Soviet days.

U.S. policies rebuked

That Putin would denounce the role of U.S. warships in the Black Sea supposedly delivering

“humanitarian aid” to Georgia is hardly surprising. But even French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner—who had called NATO’s 1999 bombing campaign against Yugoslavia a “humanitarian war”—questioned current U.S. tactics and pointedly said that “the use of warships to deliver humanitarian aid risks enflaming tensions with Russia.”

Kouchner’s statement shows all the tensions, fissures and weaknesses within this major alliance that can unravel it. Kouchner said that the crisis “can only be solved politically and not with warships.” He also cast doubt on the political value of Cheney’s trip to Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. (Bloomberg News, Sept 6)

Cheney’s visit to Azerbaijan, an oil-rich country on the Caspian Sea that was once a republic of the Soviet Union, was a big setback. The U.S. financed the building of a \$4- billion, 1,000-mile, million-barrels-a-day oil pipeline from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, across Georgia to its capital Tbilisi to Ceyhan, a port in Turkey.

This vast and expensive construction project—called the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan or BTC line—was a U.S. effort begun during the Clinton administration. Its whole purpose was to route oil for Western markets away from transit through Russia. For the same reason, billions were also spent for the Nabucco gas pipeline that runs from Baku via Georgia to Turkey.

According to a Sept. 8 Times of London article entitled “How the West is losing the energy cold war,” Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev publicly snubbed Cheney, phoned Russian President Medvedev the moment after he met with Cheney and ruled out supplying gas for the Nabucco gas line. “A disgruntled Mr. Cheney apparently then failed to appear at an official banquet.”

Then on Sept. 16, the two pro-U.S. parties in the Ukraine regime split and brought down the government despite Washington’s efforts to keep them united against Moscow. This is quite a turnaround after almost two decades of growing U.S. corporate and political domination of the entire region.

Collapse of a U.S. puppet

The dangerous escalation of NATO ships in the Black Sea, the further expansion of NATO membership, the attempt to line up the other Western imperialist members of NATO to impose sanctions on Russia, Cheney’s heavy-handed visit and the dramatic increase in aid are all desperate U.S. imperialist efforts to reinforce its position. But these measures can’t reverse the U.S.’s big setback in its Georgian client state.

The Georgian army had received five years of U.S. and Israeli military training and millions of dollars of Pentagon high-tech equipment, along with U.S. political support and encouragement to join NATO. Thousands of U.S. corporate-funded nongovernmental organizations ran most of the state apparatus, keeping Georgia firmly in the U.S. orbit.

The Georgian President Saakashvili then initiated a devastating attack on the tiny autonomous region of South Ossetia on Aug. 7, bombing its capital Tskhinvali and the surrounding area and killing many South Ossetians.

Within a day of the Russian counterattack, the Georgian military collapsed in utter chaos. Officers abandoned their posts, high jacked ambulances and fled back to the capital of Tbilisi. Units could not communicate. The ranks of soldiers then dumped tons of new U.S. weapons on the roadway and also fled.

A Sept. 3 New York Times article explained: "Georgia's military shortfalls were serious and too difficult to change merely by upgrading equipment." The article, however, went on to say that "training and equipping new brigades, re-equipping existing forces and installing a modern air-defense network could cost \$8 billion to \$9 billion," and that this was under discussion.

Only U.S. solution is more war

The U.S. corporate ruling class sees no other option except war to salvage its position. This is reflected in both Republican and Democratic support for U.S. aid to Georgia, along with continuing support for a further expansion of NATO, troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. bases around the world.

Even though the U.S. is suffering political, economic and military setbacks, the contradiction that leads invariably to increased threat of war is that militarism is an endless subsidy for the dominant U.S. corporations—the military corporations of Boeing, Lockheed-Martin, McDonald Douglas and GE—along with thousands of contractors and subcontractors. The war in the Caucasus was "a bell-ringer for defense stocks." (Wall Street Journal, Aug.16)

The excuses for new wars and new arms shipments are mother's milk to these merchants of death.

The U.S. military budget is already larger than that of the rest of the world combined, and it is growing. U.S. imperialism today has no solutions to the crises emerging around the globe except militarism, war and the threat of war. This makes the entire capitalist system more dangerous and more desperate.

It is essential that the working-class movement and progressive and anti-war activists oppose not just the individual wars of U.S. imperialism. Opposing all U.S. wars and calling for the abolition of NATO is now on the agenda.

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