

Dealing with a Resurgent Russia

**A Policy Briefing
For
The Fraser Institute,
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Remarks

There are three conclusions

Most of the other former Soviet states are either semi-authoritarian or complete dictatorships, suppressing various degrees of popular discontent and fearing civil unrest. We have lately seen the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine from November 2004 to January 2005, the Tulip Revolution in

Russian disillusionment increased with the Kosovo conflict in 1999, which showed, in Russian eyes, that NATO was not a purely defensive organization, but was prepared to wage aggressive war without the authorization of the UN Security Council. The Kosovo conflict also demonstrated to them that the West, in attacking Russia's friend, Serbia, was prepared to ignore serious Russian interests. The US also overrode Russian interests when it withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (IBM) Treaty in 2001 to pursue its plan to develop missile defence. The American plan to install missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, over strong Russian objections, has been interpreted by the Russians as an attempt at encirclement.

The Russians saw the Coloured Revolutions that shook Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, from 2003 to 2005, as the product of Western coups intended to weaken Russia. The Russians were concerned not merely at the strategic implications of these Revolutions, but also with the danger that the contagion might spread even to Russia.

In addition, the steady increase in the price of oil seems to have given President Putin in 2005 the incentive to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy.

Second Conclusion

A Conflict Principally Caused by Russian Efforts to Dominate

The second conclusion we can draw from Georgian Conflict is that its immediate cause is to be found in Russian efforts to reassert dominance over Georgia. Russia apparently considers that it needs to control the southern Caucasus in order to buttress its hold on the northern Caucasus. As it has in other secessionist regions, Moscow has exploited the separation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to pressure and destabilize Georgia. In this policy, the Russians have been singularly aided by the short-sightedly bellicose and chauvinist attitudes of the Georgians. South Ossetia and Abkhazia revolted from 1992 to 94, when the Georgian president sought to take away their autonomy. Without Russian military support for their revolts,^v they would likely not have succeeded. Before the revolts, Abkhazis constituted only 13% of the population, of Abkhazia, while Georgians were 52%.^{vi}

After the cease-fires, Russia furnished progressively more economic, administrative and military help to the rebellious regions. In the end, ministers in the de facto governments, and officers in their armed forces were Russians. The Russians also moved in regular troops, besides their peacekeepers, issued passports to most residents, and allowed them to vote in Russian elections. Neither the Abkhazis nor the Ossetians are of Russian origin or culture.

Hostile acts never totally ceased after the cease fires. Georgia staged incursions into the two territories. Russia launched bombing raids, principally connected with the war in Chechnya, against Georgia.

In 2004, it became clear to the Georgians that the West was moving to recognize the independence of Kosovo. The Georgians felt that they had to reabsorb the two rebellious regions into Georgia before this happened. They tried to conquer South Ossetia.^{vii} They occupied districts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia where they set up alternative governments.^{viii}

In the same year, 2004, according to Andrei Illarionov, who, until the end of 2005, was an economic adviser to President Putin, Russia began to prepare for an invasion of Georgia so as to get rid of President Saakashvili. Russia took its decision in reaction to the Rose Revolution that had brought Saakashvili to power at the end of 2003, and Saakashvili's announcement of his intention of taking Georgia into NATO. Russia also intended the invasion to be part of a more general attack on the West and the West's democratic, free market and security ideas for the post-Soviet space.^{ix}

Putin ordered Russian energy companies to blockade Georgia. When this failed, Russian special services blew up the pipelines and electrical power lines linking the countries. Then there was an attempted assassination of the Georgian leader of the opposition. When the Georgians expelled Russian spies, the Russians responded with an economic blockade. The Russians strengthened their forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Russian diplomats spoke openly of an invasion of Georgia in September 2008.^x

According to Sergey Markedonov, the Head of the Interethnic Relations Department of the Institute of Political and Military Analysis in Moscow, Russia took the decision in February 2008 to "reinvigorate" the conflicts, by upsetting the status quo through, among other things, recognizing the independence of the two territories.^{xi}

After the NATO Bucharest Summit, this past April, had recognized the right of Ukraine and Georgia eventually to join NATO, Putin, in his meetings with President Bush, is reported to have warned that, if NATO accorded the countries a Membership Action Plan (MAP), at the NATO summit this December, Russia might respond by instigating the partition of Ukraine and recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Putin told Bush that Ukraine was “not a real nation,” that much of its territory had been “given away” by Russia. Ukraine would “cease to exist as a state” if it joined NATO. In that case, Putin hinted, Russia would encourage the secession of the Crimea and the eastern regions of Ukraine.^{xiii} The Russian Chief of the General Staff then warned that Russia would take military as well as other types of measures against Georgia and Ukraine if these countries moved toward NATO membership.^{xiii}

There then followed in the second half of July Russian military manoeuvres just north of the Georgian border, putting troops into position, the repair by the Russian Army of

- to overthrow President Saakashvili and to discourage the appearance of other democratic governments in the former Soviet Union,
- to destroy the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline which has broken the Russian monopoly on transporting Caspian and Central Asian oil to the West
- to bring Georgia, Ukraine, and other former Soviet Republics to reconsider their pro-Western policies by demonstrating that the West can not protect them,
- to obtain acceptance by the West of a Russian sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union,
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It would be folly, however, to pursue the expansion of NATO under the present circumstances. NATO is incapable of defending either Georgia or Ukraine, and, in any case, does not have the political will to do so. An indefinite postponement of any consideration of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for either Georgia or Ukraine may be one of the best things we can do to support their security.

Instead, the West should continue to offer economic support to the countries under threat, especially Georgia and Ukraine. The EU could offer more financial aid, more open trade deals, and hold out to them the prospect of eventual membership.

A dissuasive strategy by the West will likely only succeed if we take greater account of Russian concerns, especially the Russian complaint that their security concerns are being ignored. Otherwise, if we do not, we risk a spiral of increasing tensions.

The United States might either make missile defence a cooperative project with Russia or consider abandoning its attempt to install systems in the Czech Republic and Poland. President-elect Obama's spokesman has, in fact, stated that Obama has not yet made up his mind on the issue.^{xxxv} President Sarkozy of France, in his capacity of President of the European Union, suggested on 14 November, during a meeting between the EU and Russia, that the United States should think again about its intention to install the missile defence installations.

The issue has the capacity to prevent progress on other issues. President Medvedev had announced in his speech to the Duma on 5 November that, if Washington proceeded with its plan, Russia would respond by stationing short-range missiles in its exclave of Kaliningrad, which lies between Lithuania and Poland. At his meeting with President Sarkozy, however, the Russian President declared that all countries should refrain from unilateral steps before European security discussions next summer.

Sergei Rogov, the director of the Institute of the U.S. and Canada, has, however, declared that the Russians would only renew the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1), which expires in December 2009, if the Americans abandoned their plan for the missile defence installations.^{xxxvi} It is important to prevent this treaty from being caught in the back-draft of the Georgian crisis. Without START-1 and its mutual verification and on-site inspection régimes, strategic arms control will end. START-1 has cut by 50% the number of deployed weapons in American and Russian arsenals. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty of 2002 depends on START for its implementation.^{xxxvii} In October, the two sides had agreed to resume talks on renewing START-1 in mid-November.

Initiatives such as these would also make it easier to maintain existing co-operation with the Russians on Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea, terrorism, and the storage of nuclear materials.

We might respond in some fashion to the Russian proposal for a European Security Treaty. The initiative is, however, a tricky one. As set out by President Medvedev in his speech at the World Policy Conference in Evian on 8 October, the Treaty would contain five principles:

1. A confirmation of the basic principles of security and international relations, including fulfilment of international obligations, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence and other principles set out in the UN Charter.

ⁱ Friedman, George, **The Geopolitics of Russia: Permanent Struggle**, Stratfor.Com 15 October, 2008, Johnson's Russia List, 2008 -#189, 16 October 2008, #40

ⁱⁱ Telegraph .uk.co May 7, 2008

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1933223/Gorbachev-US-could-start-new-Cold-War.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Shlapentokh, Vladimir, shlapent@msu.edu , Johnson's Russia List, 2008-#194, 24 October 2008, #29

^{iv} Terentiev, Alexander, "Russia Has its Own Munroe Doctrine" Anatoly Utkin: Future of Russia-USA Relations Depends on Who Will Become the Next American President, Profil, No.33, September 2008, Johnson's Russia List, 2008-#169, 16 September 2008, #24

^v Gegeshidze, Archil, **A Georgian Perspective towards "Unfreezing" the Georgia Conflicts**, Russian Analytical Digest, no.40/08, 8 May 2008, p.12

^{vi} , ∴ «

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kavkazcenter.com

30 September,2008www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/09/30/61325.shtml

^{vii} King, Charles, **The Five Day War Managing Moscow after the Georgian Crisis**, Foreign Affairs, November-December 2008, p. 4

^{xxviii} Gaddy Clifford G. and Ickes, Barry W. **Moscow's Jerry-Rigged Oil Pump**, Moscow Times, 28