

**Garbis Altinoglu:**

**On the Geopolitics of the Caucasus Crisis (Georgia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia; Russo-Georgian War)**

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From the Facebook page of Garbis Altinoglu; translated into publishable form by the family of Garbis Altinoglu, who also gave permission for this publication.

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Future generations will likely consider Russia's offensive against Georgia (and its backers, the United States and Israel, and to some extent the European Union) following the Georgian bombardment of South Ossetia on the night of August 7, as a historical turning point. Russia, which carried out a military operation against another country for the first time since the USSR's attack on Afghanistan at the end of 1978, took on the Georgian army, which was trained and equipped by the USA and Israel. After a few days of fighting in South Ossetia, where it brutally bombed and massacred its civilian population - Russia took out the Georgian army.<sup>1</sup>

The Russian army occupied parts of Georgia, albeit for a while, and seized a large amount of modern tanks, artillery and armored vehicles that Georgian soldiers had left while fleeing. The Russian army also significantly destroyed the military bases, infrastructure and equipment of Georgia and the United States. Russia announced that they would recognize the independence of **South Ossetia and Abkhazia** despite the objections and condemnations of the EU and even threats of sanctions, and it fulfilled this promise on 25 August.

Meanwhile, tensions were further increased by the US and NATO, which had continued their efforts to isolate Russia diplomatically. The USA and NATO sent their warships to the Black Sea under the guise of carrying "humanitarian aid" to Georgia. This despite the ceasefire achieved on August 16 with the efforts of EU's term president France; and despite Russia's corresponding gradual withdrawal of its forces in accordance with this ceasefire.

### **Causes of the Russo-Georgian War**

In December 2003, the "**Rose Revolution**", overthrew former President **Edvard Shevardnadze**. While Shevardnadze was himself pro-US, he also took into account the balance of power in the Caucasus. The **Saakashvili** clique took power with the support

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<sup>1</sup> *The intense bombardment of Tsinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, by the Georgian army on the night of August 7 to August 8, with warplanes and artillery batteries, killed more than 1,000 civilians and around 15 Russian Peacekeepers, and damaged the city's infrastructure and buildings. It was greatly destroyed and tens of thousands of Ossetians fled to Russia. As expected, the US and EU bourgeois press, which portrays the main aggressor - the US-NATO-Israeli-backed Georgia as the victim and Russia as the aggressor - ignores this tragedy; while highlighting the suffering of a much smaller number of Georgian civilians who died and were displaced during the Russian counter-operation.*

of the United States and Israel, in the covert coup called the "Rose Revolution". Why did the Saakashvili clique, which was heavily armed ever since, embark on this adventure?

The apparent reason for the Georgian offensive was to re-establish Georgia's authority over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which since the early 1990s had been de facto independent and under Russian protection. These people hated Georgian chauvinism and sympathized with Russia. The so-called 'Saakashvili' regime' faced serious opposition – as witnessed by the demonstrations of November 2007, which was violently suppressed by the Georgian "security" forces. The Saakashvili regime is associated with economic collapse, corruption, a mafia-like administration, and the impoverishment of the masses and despotism. These efforts are associated with the Saakashvili regime's attempts to inflame Georgian nationalism and try to turn the attention to "external" problems.

All these factors played an undeniable role in recent developments.

However, the main reason behind the military adventure of the Saakashvili clique is the aggressive and anti-Russian policy of the USA and NATO. Inside Georgia, American and Israeli consultants work in the army, police and intelligence services, and many Israeli companies are active. The cabinet contains ministers of Jewish origin and of Israeli citizenship – for example – the Minister of Defense Davit Kezerashvili and the Minister of State for Reunification Temur Yakobaşvili.<sup>2</sup>

Georgia is the base of the USA and Israel in the Caucasus where the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (which has been supported by the USA for political purposes since the late 1990s) goes through. It is also where the NABUCCO natural gas pipeline with the Caspian crossing is anticipated to pass through. The US President **G.W. Bush** and his partners are intensely lobbying Georgia to be included in NATO. President Saakashvili studied law in US, and has repeatedly expressed his admiration for G.W. Bush. Georgia sent many soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq to fight against the peoples of the abovementioned countries. Therefore, it is **not sensible** for the **Georgian President** to make decisions **alone and on his own** by adopting a chauvinist position. That in a war which will obviously lead to a strong reaction from a much stronger state -namely Russia- simply because of expansionist impulses to distract attention from internal problems.

Especially, during the US Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice's** visit to Tbilisi on 10 July 2008, the US reiterated its support for Georgia's NATO membership. As of 16 July 2008, the Georgian army started a joint military exercise with approximately 1,000 US soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly the US was aware of small-scale clashes between Georgian and South Ossetian forces throughout July and early August. Therefore, it would not be

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<sup>2</sup> *Georgian Minister **Temur Yakobashvili** told the Jerusalem Post on Saturday, August 9, that "Israelis are "proud as a Jew" for the military training given to some of the Georgian army units ("Georgian MP Lauds IDF Military Training", Jerusalem Post, , 11 August 2008).*

<sup>3</sup> ***Brendan O'Neill**, who said that the USA equipped the Georgian army with heavy weapons, wrote that just last month, 1,200 US soldiers and 800 Georgian soldiers conducted intensive military training at the Vaziani base near the capital, Tbilisi. (See "Georgia: The Messy Truth Behind the Morality Tale," August 11, 2008).*

wrong to consider the Georgian attack as a covert attack by the USA-Israel-NATO on Russia's historical sphere of influence.

For American neo-fascists, we can say that this war is a means to measure Russia's reaction and military readiness, to test where Moscow's 'red lines' begin. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia experienced perhaps one of the most depressed periods in its history. It regressed rapidly in a number of areas, and even entered a period of neo-colonialization during the reign of **Boris Yeltsin**. However, Russia began emerging from this quagmire with the Russian monopoly bourgeoisie and state apparatus placing **Vladimir Putin** in the Presidency in 2000.

USA imperialism tried to take full advantage of this weakness of Russia. Despite the disintegration of NATO's rival Warsaw Pact and not facing any threat, the US and EU imperialists did not dissolve this aggressive alliance. On the contrary, they did not dissolve NATO, but embraced former Soviet republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia). Moreover, they plan to make Ukraine and Georgia members of NATO.

The USA and its partners invade Afghanistan and Iraq on the grounds of the "war on terror"; establish bases in some Central Asian republics; plot "colour revolutions" in countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan; and establish military bases in Bulgaria and Romania. They make treaties, threaten war against Iran, place a missile shield against Poland and the Czech Republic – against Russia, etc.

All these acts rightly increase Russia's security concerns and sense of siege. Kosova became de facto independent after the 77-day bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO in 1999. It is now home to a huge US base called **Camp Bondsteel**. Kosova's independence in February 2008, was supported by the US and EU, despite Russia's objection, which made tensions even more taut.

Russian President Putin, in a speech as early as May 2006, referred to the need to increase Russia's military budget, which is only around 4 percent of that of the United States. Referring to the United States, Putin used a proverb saying:

"Comrade wolf, who knows whom to eat, eats without listening to anyone and it is clear that he will continue to behave like this."

In his April 2008 speech at the **NATO-Russia Council** meeting held in Bucharest Putin also said:

"The emergence of a strong military bloc on our borders will be considered by Russia as a direct threat to the security of our country."

In the same speech, Putin also warned that Ukraine's membership in NATO would lead to the disintegration of Ukraine. However, until the last Russo-Georgian war, Russia did not or could not show a clear and active reaction despite its harsh statements. Moscow's military action against the USA and NATO in Georgia, shows that the Russian bear, whose self-confidence has increased, will challenge the American eagle, whose feathers have begun to fall, and will not allow its 'red lines' to be crossed.

**The question should also be asked:** While Russia more actively protected South Ossetia and Abkhazia (whose populations sympathize with it due to Georgian chauvinism and the threat) - why did Russia *not also* support and stimulate the aspirations of these autonomous regions to become independent and join Russia?

One of the most important reasons for this lies in the fact that Russia - which experienced a long pause and a relatively long collapse after 1991 - is also facing a demographic crisis. Overall Russia's population declined by 3 percent, from 148.7 million in 1992 to 143.8 million in 2007, while the average life expectancy has been shortened. The collapse of the social health system, the impoverishment of the broad masses of the people, the plundering of Russia's wealth by the US and Western European imperialists and local oligarchs, and the spread of alcoholism and HIV/AIDS played a decisive role in this, especially under the brutal capitalism applied after 1991. Part of the problem is also the increasing proportion of the Muslim population in Russia.

One of the most important priorities of the rulers of Russia, especially during the Putin era, has been to reverse the demographic trends. As a matter of fact, Putin touched upon this issue in his May 2006 speech, in which he criticized "Comrade Wolf," and after pointing out that the population is decreasing by around 700,000 every year, he said:

"We've touched upon this subject many times before, but we haven't actually achieved much. We need to reduce the death rate, implement an effective immigration policy, and increase the birth rate."

Therefore, in the coming years we can expect these following events: Russia's unification with Belarus (whose population is very close to itself in ethnic terms); the division of Ukraine (which Washington has been trying to influence for years - between the US and pro-EU-Western Ukraine, and the pro-Russian East and South Ukraine which has a relationship with Russia). Russia can be expected to establish or unite very close relations and tend towards better relations with the Muslim peoples in their own lands, and with the Islamic world in general.

Considering these following factors: the interest of the USA and NATO in Ukraine and the Caucasus; Russia's shared obsession with Washington and Brussels with "Islamic terrorism" and its genocide-like massacre against the Chechen people - this entire process is pregnant with great turmoil.

### **A Change in Russia's Stance**

Not only in the period of **Boris Yeltsin** (1991-99), but also in a significant part of the period of **Vladimir Putin**, the Russian imperialists have followed a policy of appeasement and surrender towards the USA. The USA is the main enemy of the working class and peoples of the world, and the strongest imperialist focus. As it will be remembered, the Russian imperialists supported the so-called "anti-terrorism" struggle of the USA and its partners in order to expand and consolidate their sphere of influence. Albeit they have placed certain reservations. Russia essentially approved the US attack on Afghanistan and Iraq, and a series of UN "Security" Council sanctions against Iran. Russia was extremely cautious about selling weapons to countries on the USA blacklist.

Russia allowed the USA to provide logistical support to the occupying forces in Afghanistan utilizing its own land; Russia did not take a stand against Israel's terror

against the Palestinian people; and Russia supported Israel's attack against the Lebanese people in July 2006. The attitude of the Chinese state on these matters was more or less the same as Russia's. For example, during the 33-day war, Russia hosted at St. Petersburg the G8 meeting including Russia. The G8 countries targeted the victims Palestine and Lebanon, not the aggressor Israel, in a statement they made on July 16, 2006, referring to HAMAS and Hezbollah:

"These extremists and their supporters cannot be allowed to plunge the Middle East into chaos," they said.

Shortly after that, the UN "Security" Council, of which Russia is a permanent member, on 11 August 2006, defended Israel, while it blamed the Lebanese resistance, called on Hezbollah to disarm and trying to tie its hands against Israel. They passed the disgraceful resolution 1701 recognizing Lebanon's "right" to invade its air and sea space.

This appeasement policy pursued by Russia towards the USA and its partners could not be explained solely by its relative weakness. In my article titled "***The Last Move of the USA-Israel-Britain Axis of Evil***" that I wrote on 25-26 December 2006, I said the following:

"It can be said that the appeasement policy followed by imperialist states such as Russia and China, not Germany and France, which has tied their fate to the collapsing super-state despite their disagreements with the United States, is in some ways similar to the policy followed by Britain and France in the 1930s. The fact that the US imperialists are engaged in an endless war in Afghanistan and Iraq that is tiring them out economically, politically and militarily, is facilitating the efforts of Moscow and Beijing to increase their influence elsewhere in the world.

Washington's real quagmire is in Afghanistan and Iraq. It allows Russia to recapture former spheres of influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia and to open up to the Middle East, and for China to consolidate its positions in Southeast Asia and acquire new spheres of influence in Africa and Latin America. Therefore, the argument that the imperialist plans of Moscow and Beijing underlie the US's less-than-expected resistance to its aggressive policies towards Iran cannot be underestimated."

However, at this point, Russia had to put aside its' policy of appeasement and started to use its' claws rather than just showing its teeth. It is clear that China, which has to compete more with the USA not only in Central Asia and the Middle East, but also in Africa and Latin America - and which US strategists describe as the main threat - will have to follow the same path.

In this period the USA, is trying to consolidate and expand its own positions through military force. But it had begun to lose its position as the only superpower. Hence the possibility of the sharpening of inter-imperialist contradictions to turn into war has increased. The recession, which the economy is going through is expected to gradually turn into a depression. This sharpens the contradictions between the working class and other poor layers and the monopoly bourgeoisie in the country. It will encourage the USA, whose military-imperialist character is becoming more and more evident, to engage in new military adventures. On the other hand, we can talk about a reverse trend: American neo-fascists risking new wars, hitting the hard rocks of the heroic

resistance of the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq. All this causing heavy – and much more than is seen by the official figures – human and material losses. More importantly, the massive demoralization of the army is getting more and more difficult.

In fact, Russia's harsh response to the US-Israeli-backed Georgian attack on South Ossetia will at least have an effect in this direction in the foreseeable future.

### Consequences of War

We can say that Russia gained from the war in the short term. Moscow, with this tactical victory, gained these consequences:

- a) The US-Israel base in the Caucasus inflicted heavy military losses on Georgia and paved the way for the de-facto independence of the autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia or their possible union with Russia.
- b) Former Soviet republics that have either entered or are planning to enter the US-NATO line or that host bases or missile systems established against Russia, are intimidated.
- c) Russia showed that the USA-NATO forces, which could not actively help the Saakashvili clique, which had 2,000 soldiers in Iraq until recently, cannot do much in this part of the world; and that Russia is determined to keep the Caucasus within Russia's historical sphere of influence.
- d) The USA-NATO plan, which tried to drive Russia away from the Black Sea with the help of its Ukrainian and Georgian henchmen, failed and the Russian navy was anchored in Abkhazia's Sukhumi and Georgia's Poti ports.
- e) Russia threatens the EU with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline since EU is heavily dependent on Russia and the pipelines under its control; and with the NABUCCO project, which is still in the planning phase and is envisioned to bring Central Asian natural gas to Europe via the Caspian Sea and Georgia. It sent the message that **EU should not rely on it**<sup>4</sup> and that it should not be dragged along the tail of the US-Israel-Britain axis.

***It is difficult to predict what will happen in the medium and especially in the long term. However, I can say this much:***

The military power of the US has **significantly decreased** due to the Afghanistan and Iraq adventures, which are spread over a very wide region from Afghanistan-Pakistan to the Horn of Africa, from Iraq to the Persian Gulf and Latin America.

The economy of the USA has entered a **recession**, and their budget and foreign trade deficits amount to trillions of dollars and it is trying to finance its imperial ambitions with

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<sup>4</sup> *Working at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Prof. Pavel K. Baev rightly stated: "After the military conflict with Russia, Georgia cannot be considered a safe transit route; This will not change, regardless of the level of NATO support." ("Nabucco: 'Pie in the Sky' After Georgia Crisis", 25 August 2008). Caucasus expert at Haifa University, Dr. Brenda Shaffer also shares this view. According to her, "We can forget about this project now. Russia has clearly shown that this will be the case." (In same article)*

an industrial base that is gradually weakening, and with dollar piles and treasury bills held by countries such as China and Japan, is in a strategic regression. This is in line with the uneven development law of capitalism, and the USA is in the process of collapse.

As a matter of fact, despite the harsh statements they made, the USA and the EU could not take any serious deterrent steps against Russia, and it does not seem possible to take them. Moreover, the Caucasus crisis has affected **the countries** within NATO and the EU which **favour taking a hard line against Russia** (USA, Britain, Poland, Baltic countries, etc.); and those **countries which are dependent on Russia for its natural gas needs**; as well as the **countries that do not want to lose access to the large and ever-expanding Russian market**. It also **further deepens the rift between** some other countries (Germany, France, Italy, etc.) **who perceive Russia (and China) as a counterbalance to US hegemony**.

### Conclusion

The revolutionary vanguard of the working class and consistent democrats and internationalists cannot take sides in this inter-imperialist conflict for spheres of influence, raw materials, markets and military-political supremacy. They believe that war is inherent in capitalism and imperialism, and that real and lasting peace can only be resolved with the world-wide victory of proletarian revolutions and the overthrow of the capitalist-imperialist system.

Moreover they know the Caucasus crisis can only be resolved with the progress and victory of a struggle led by the revolutionary parties of the working class and under the banner of proletarian internationalism.

On the other hand, they say that the USA and NATO, or to be more precise, the neo-fascist axis of the USA-Israel-Britain - constitute the most aggressive bloc. This bloc, which is the main enemy of the working class and peoples of the world, is the main instigator and executive of the wars of aggression. Nor can they ignore the fact that weakening, isolating and neutralizing the axis is the main task of the working class and the peoples.

Despite the reactionary nature of their regimes, the Russian and Chinese imperialists are already in a defensive position, and their attempts and counter-attacks to preserve the status quo, that is, to encircle, regress and isolate themselves by the US-NATO axis, serve to preserve the existing peace in the present phase and to create a new situation in which nuclear weapons will be used.

This complicates the outbreak of a world war. Therefore, the revolutionary leaders of the working class and consistent democrats and internationalists welcome the repulsing of the Georgian attack launched by the US-NATO axis against Russia.

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**Turkey's role in this crisis** is not covered here, as it is so broad that it will be the subject of a separate article. However, it is known that Ankara has been trying to create an Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey axis. This axis is pro-US and NATO since the mid-1990s,

and supports the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project, which has been backed by the United States since the late 1990s.

In March 1995 –the father of today's President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev- Turkish reactionaries who attempted to overthrow then-president Heydar Aliyev sent a specialist military team to this country to train the Georgian Border Guard as early as March 1996. This team trained Georgian soldiers at the Lilo military base for two months. (It is probably no coincidence that these developments overlap in time with the "Military Cooperation Agreement" signed between Turkey and Israel on February 23, 1996.)

According to Özgür Press on January 18, 2000 – reflecting the views of the Russian government – the Izvestiya newspaper wrote that the Caucasus Pact (proposed by President Süleyman Demirel in Tbilisi at that time) was “an anti-Moscow attempt”. Izvestiya then said, “The pact was an attempt prepared against Russia's geopolitical tendencies”. The article also stated that Turkey was “trying to steer” the regional states and that Ankara was “trying to establish political axes under its rule” within the Commonwealth of Independent States:

It then included these views:

“The disintegration process of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the desires of Georgia and Azerbaijan to move away from Russia overlap with Turkey's efforts to gain the regional super-state role. However, Ankara is not ready to play the role of a full guarantor of the independence of the Caucasian republics. It is trying to play a guiding role in the integration of these countries into European structures and NATO.”

In an article in February 12, 2000 the daily *Milliyet*, it was stated that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, **V. Guliyev**, declared that his country supported the signing of a tripartite military pact with Turkey and Georgia. According to *Milliyet*, Guliyev said that by becoming a member of NATO, the establishment of alliance bases on Azerbaijani territory could also be on the agenda; but first, the Azeri army should be upgraded to a Western level. At the same time, the President of Georgia, **Edvard Shevardnadze**, is said to have reminded Moscow once again that the Russian bases in his country should be closed until July 1. The Russian newspaper *Kommersant* described this statement as: "Georgia begins preparations for the pact to be established with Turkey and Azerbaijan".

Considering that the situation is not much different today, the policy of establishing a Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia axis against Russia (and Iran and Armenia) in the Caucasus and its immediate surroundings and protecting the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is equivalent. This has been a general and continuous policy of the Turkish reactionaries, not of this government or that or that ruling class fraction.