

In the guise of humanitarian aid

Bush dispatches US military forces to Georgia

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In a major escalation of the conflict with Russia over Georgia, President George W. Bush on Wednesday announced a “vigorous and ongoing” deployment of US military forces to its key ally in the Caucasus. Bush appeared in the White House Rose Garden for the second time in three days, this time flanked by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and announced the military buildup, casting it as a humanitarian relief operation.

Even as he spoke of a humanitarian mission, Bush made clear the military dimensions of the measures he was announcing. He said he was directing Pentagon chief Gates to lead the mission, which would be “headed by the United States military.” He announced that a C-17 military aircraft was already on its way to Georgia and that “in the days ahead we will use US aircraft, as well as naval forces, to deliver humanitarian and medical supplies.”

This is a formula for an injection of US military and naval forces into Georgia of indeterminate scope and duration. It will certainly involve the presence of hundreds if not thousands of uniformed US military personnel on the ground, and a substantial number of warships in the region. The US is introducing this military force into a situation that remains highly unstable and combustible, raising the possibility of a direct military clash between the United States and Russia.

Bush spoke less than a day after Russia and Georgia had agreed provisionally to a cease-fire in their five-day war. The agreement had been brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, acting on behalf of the European Union.

Even as Bush spoke, Russia and Georgia were trading accusations of truce violations, and Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili was objecting to provisions of the agreement which, he claimed, failed to prevent the pro-Russian break-away republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from seceding from Georgia.

In his remarks, Bush issued an implicit threat against any attempt by Russia to interfere with Washington’s “humanitarian” operation. “We expect Russia to honor its commitment,” he said, “to let in all forms of humanitarian assistance. We expect Russia to ensure that all lines of communications and transport, including seaports, airports, roads and airspace, remain open for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and for civilian transit.”

The US will pour military resources into Georgia to strengthen its hand against Russia, and denounce any objections by Moscow as an attack on humanitarian aid and a violation of the cease-fire agreement.

Within minutes of Bush’s Rose Garden statement, Saakashvili spelled out its essential meaning in a televised address from Tbilisi. “You have heard the statement by the US president that the United States is starting a military-humanitarian operation in Georgia,” he

said. “It means that Georgian ports and airports will be taken under the control of the US defense ministry...”

He went on to call Bush’s “relief” mission a “turning point,” and characterized its import as “definitely an American military presence.”

Bush also announced that Rice would immediately travel to France to meet with Sarkozy and then go to Georgia. Employing the rhetoric of the Cold War, he said Rice would meet with Saakashvili and “continue our efforts to rally the free world in defense of a free Georgia.”

He further threatened Russia with diplomatic and political sanctions, suggesting it might be excluded from the G-8 group of industrialized nations and prevented from joining the World Trade Organization.

Bush’s remarks were drenched with hypocrisy. He reiterated Washington’s support for Georgian control of the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, invoking once again the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.” Neither he nor any other American spokesperson has explained why Georgia’s use of murderous violence against South Ossetia in its indiscriminate shelling of the region’s capital city was a legitimate defense of “territorial integrity,” while Serbia’s use of force against Kosovan secessionists was a war crime.

The US seized on Serbia’s moves against CIA-backed separatists in Kosovo to carry out a ten-week air war, under the auspices of NATO, in 1999. While Washington decries Russia’s “disproportionate” use of force against Georgian troops which attacked South Ossetia and condemns Moscow for military action beyond the borders of the breakaway republic, the US and NATO rained bombs and missiles on virtually all parts of Serbia, demolishing bridges, water pumping stations, electricity grids, government buildings, housing developments, schools and hospitals in the capital city of Belgrade. The US and NATO killed far more civilians in its campaign to crush Serbia, a traditional ally of Russia, than have been killed by both sides in the current fighting in the Caucasus.

The US has absolutely no political or moral standing to denounce Russia or anyone else for deploying military force. Washington asserts an unlimited and unilateral right to mobilize its massive apparatus of military violence wherever and whenever it wishes, spreading death and destruction from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia and threatening even more bloody conflagrations.

In the current conflict, the US government and media have cast Russia as the aggressor. There is no progressive content to Moscow’s actions in Georgia. They are motivated by the predatory aims of the Russian ruling elite, which is intent on reasserting Russian control over territories on its border that it dominated for centuries. However, the eruption of war in the Caucasus is the outcome of a policy pursued

by US imperialism since the breakup of the Soviet Union whose ultimate aim is the reduction of Russia to a semi-colonial status.

It is inconceivable that Washington was not intimately involved in the preparations for Georgia's attack on South Ossetia. US military advisers virtually run the military of what Washington considers its key ally in the Caucasus, a strategically critical bridgehead between the oil-rich Caspian Basin and Western Europe.

Just one month ago Secretary of State Rice visited Tbilisi and reaffirmed US support for Georgia's admission to NATO, a development which Russia considers an intolerable threat to its security. Rice's visit was followed by a massive three-week military training exercise, in which 1,000 US troops participated.

The incendiary measures announced by Bush on Wednesday represent the response of American imperialism to the major setback it has suffered as a result of Russia's military intervention in Georgia. There is great concern within the US ruling elite that Russia's routing of Georgia will undermine Washington's drive to displace Russia from Moscow's former spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and establish American hegemony over the Eurasian land mass.

US policy makers worry that the example of Georgia will weaken US control over right-wing client regimes it has established in a whole number of countries that were either part of the Soviet Union, such as Georgia and Ukraine, or allied to the Soviet Union through the Warsaw Pact.

From the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 to the present, the United States has carried out a policy of militarily encircling Russia and surrounding it with hostile states dependent upon and subservient to Washington.

As the USSR was disintegrating, the United States launched its first war against Iraq, a key ally of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. During the 1990s, the US and Western Europe sponsored the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in order to isolate and weaken the Russian ally Serbia.

In 1998, the US spearheaded the incorporation into NATO, the US-dominated military alliance, of a whole number of newly independent states that had been either part of the Soviet Union or allied to it through the Warsaw Pact, including Estonia, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria.

In 1999 the US launched the air war against Serbia. At the same time, the US organized the construction of a new pipeline to transport oil from the Caspian Basin, via Baku, through Georgia to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, bypassing Russian territory.

In 2002, the US set up military bases in the former Central Asian Soviet republics of Uzbekistan (since then closed at the insistence of the Uzbek government) and Kyrgyzstan. At the end of 2003, the US engineered the "Rose Revolution" that brought Saakashvili to power in Georgia. In 2004, NATO admitted a new group of states formerly aligned with Russia—Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. One year later Washington orchestrated the "Orange Revolution" that toppled a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and replaced it with a pro-American regime.

The final chapter in this assault on the strategic position of Russia was the recognition last February of Kosovo's bid for independence from Serbia.

Until now, the US has encountered no serious resistance. The events of the past week represent a major shift. For the first time, Russia, flush with oil money and able to exploit the overextended state of the US military, with its massive commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan,

pushed back.

This has evoked an apoplectic response in the American ruling elite, which has no intention of accepting a diminution of its influence in the regions formerly dominated by the Soviet Union. US imperialism will react by immensely escalating its confrontation with Russia, no matter what the cost.

There is also a domestic component to the US escalation of tensions with Russia. The Bush administration is consciously seeking to create an atmosphere of international crisis in the run-up to the November presidential election. It calculates that an election held in an environment of fear and insecurity will boost the electoral chances of the Republican candidate John McCain.

McCain has based his campaign on his military background and his supposed foreign policy experience. From early on, he has called for a more combative stance toward Russia, and has responded to the Georgia crisis by demanding Russia's ejection from the G-8 and other punitive measures.

The *Wall Street Journal* in an editorial on Wednesday summed up the demand of sections of the ruling elite and elements within the Bush administration for a major and permanent shift to something like a new Cold War against Russia. The newspaper wrote: "Reshaping US policy toward Russia will take longer than the months between now and January 20, when a new president takes office. But Mr. Bush can at least atone for his earlier misjudgments about Mr. Putin and steer policy in a new direction that his successor would have to deal with."

There are, in fact, only relatively minor tactical differences between McCain and Democratic candidate Barack Obama on US policy toward Russia. Both continue to demand the admission of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO, which would put the US-led military alliance on the very doorstep of Russia. Had Georgia already been a member of NATO, the alliance would have been legally bound to intervene militarily in its defense following Russia's incursion into South Ossetia.

The trajectory of the imperialist drive to carve up the world, spearheaded by US imperialism's mad drive for global hegemony, is ominously clear. The American ruling elite will drag American workers and all of humanity into a catastrophe unless it is stopped. The only social force capable of achieving this is the international working class, united in the struggle to put an end to capitalism, the source of imperialist war, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program.



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