

Bush escalates confrontation with Russia over Georgia

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In a provocative statement delivered from the White House Rose Garden on Monday, President George W. Bush escalated the confrontation between the United States and Russia over the current fighting in Georgia.

Bush denounced what he called Russia's "dramatic and brutal" military escalation and demanded that Moscow agree to an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of its troops from the Caucasian country on its border. He accused Russia of planning to bomb the Tbilisi airport and charged that Moscow was seeking to overthrow the pro-US government of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Bush reiterated US statements about the inviolability of Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity—diplomatic language supporting the efforts of the government in Tbilisi to reestablish control over the breakaway pro-Russian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Bush's remarks followed a statement Sunday by Vice President Dick Cheney, who said Russian "aggression" could not go unanswered. Cheney's intervention suggested the existence of a faction within the Bush administration that is pushing for a more aggressive US response to the Russian intervention in Georgia.

The statements from the White House express a staggering level of hypocrisy. The US government issued no protest when Georgian military forces attacked South Ossetia last Thursday night, indiscriminately targeting apartment blocks in the capital of Tskhinvali with tank cannon and mortars. It is estimated that the Georgian invaders killed 2,000 civilians, a bloodletting that accounts for the vast bulk of civilian deaths to date.

It was only when the Russian military responded to the Georgian attack with a rapid and massive counteroffensive, crushing the much smaller Georgian force, that Washington became alarmed.

There is nothing remotely progressive in the military actions taken by the Putin regime. The Russian ruling

elite is pursuing its own predatory aims in the Caucasus, a region that was ruled for two centuries by Moscow before the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Moreover, the eruption of war in the Caucasus underscores the tragic consequences of the dissolution of the USSR. It has exposed the masses of the former Soviet Union, including Russia and the other Soviet republics, to the dangers of war and the predations of the major imperialist powers. For the peoples of the former USSR, the answer is to be found not in the nationalist and militaristic policies of Putin, but rather in the internationalist program of socialist revolution.

Notwithstanding the reactionary aims of the Russian regime, no objective observer can contest the fact that Washington's provocative policy toward Russia—aimed at supplanting Russia in its long-time spheres of influence—is the primary factor behind the eruption of war between Russia and Georgia.

The media has been virtually silent on the visit just one month ago of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Georgia. Rice held talks with Saakashvili and gave a press conference at which she denounced Russia, backed Saakashvili's efforts to reassert Georgian control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and reiterated US support for Georgia's incorporation into NATO.

Russia has made clear that it considers the entry of former Soviet republics such as Georgia and Ukraine into NATO an intolerable threat to its security. Were Georgia already a part of NATO, as Moscow is well aware, the alliance's member states would be legally bound to intervene militarily in Georgia's support.

It is inconceivable that Saakashvili did not review in detail with Rice his plans for a military assault on South Ossetia. Georgia—which is totally dependent on US military, diplomatic and financial support—could not take such a portentous action without informing Washington in advance and securing American sanction.

Preparations for the attack would have been far advanced when Rice met with Saakashvili a month ago. The Georgian military, moreover, is dominated from top to bottom by US military advisers.

The United States has been pouring military aid into Georgia ever since the US-led air war against Serbia in 1999, and the pace and scale of American military aid have accelerated since Washington engineered the so-called “Rose Revolution” that brought Harvard-educated Saakashvili to power in early 2004.

An article in Monday’s *New York Times* describes “a Pentagon effort to overhaul Georgia’s forces from bottom to top.” The article states: “At senior levels, the United States helped rewrite Georgian military doctrine and train its commanders and staff officers. At the squad level, American marines and soldiers trained Georgian soldiers in the fundamentals of battle.

“Georgia, meanwhile, began re-equipping its forces with Israeli and American firearms, reconnaissance drones, communications and battlefield management equipment, new convoys of vehicles and stockpiles of ammunition.”

As for the principle of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the US is highly selective when it comes to its application. No one in either political party or in the establishment media has sought to explain why Serbia’s military intervention against Kosovan separatists was a war crime, while Georgia’s attack on South Ossetia was legitimate.

The Bush administration was the prime mover behind Kosovo’s declaration of independence from Serbia last February, on grounds indistinguishable from those claimed by anti-Georgian separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Moreover, the US encouraged and financed the forces that sought to effect the secession of Chechnya from Russia in the 1990s.

Since the United States was clearly involved in the Georgian assault on South Ossetia, one must ask what were its intentions. It is difficult to believe that US policy makers believed Russia would take no action in response to such an immense provocation. Why then, would they support a move that would bring Russia into a direct conflict with one of Washington’s principal allies in the Caucasus—a region that constitutes a bridgehead between the resource-rich Caspian Basin and Western Europe and houses critical oil and gas pipelines?

The only plausible answer is that the United States is deliberately seeking a major escalation of tensions

between Russia and the West. Even if the current conflict does not spiral immediately into a wider conflagration, the fate of “little Georgia” will be invoked by the United States to justify a far more aggressive and confrontational stance toward Russia.

The demands being raised by the Bush administration, the European Union, the United Nations and others for a return to the “status quo ante” in Georgia are drenched in hypocrisy. They all know very well that the US is not about to abandon what it has come to see as a critical prop to its position in the Caucasus and its long-term perspective of reducing Russia to a semi-colonial status.

The resumption of something akin to the Cold War underscores the real motives that underlay the decades of confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. American imperialism considered the Soviet Union—and continues to view Russia—as an obstacle to its geo-strategic aim of securing hegemony over Eurasia.

There is undoubtedly a domestic political component to the US-backed provocation against Russia as well. The Bush administration and the Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, want the November elections to take place under conditions of immense international crisis. They calculate that an environment of fear and insecurity will strengthen McCain’s chances, since a major prop of his campaign is his supposed foreign policy experience and national security expertise.

Obama, predictably and pathetically, is responding by seeking to assert his own militaristic credentials. Within minutes of Bush’s threatening statement against Russia on Monday, Obama issued his own denunciation of Russia in terms almost identical to those of Bush and McCain.

The immensely dangerous implications of the eruption of war in the Caucasus leave no doubt about where the drive of imperialism to carve up the world is leading. US imperialism intends to let nothing stand in the way of its goal of establishing global hegemony. It is dragging the American working class and the world into a catastrophe.

The only force that can stop it is the revolutionary mobilization of the American and international working class.



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