

Washington steps up its anti-Russian rhetoric

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Despite the signing of a ceasefire agreement with Georgia by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, and repeated assurances that Russian military forces would begin withdrawal from most Georgian territory Monday, the Bush administration and the American media have intensified their campaign of anti-Russian propaganda, aiming at creating a crisis atmosphere both in Europe and the United States.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in Brussels Monday night for a NATO foreign ministers conference set to begin the following day, where the US and the former Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe are expected to press for an official denunciation of Russia.

After that meeting, Rice will proceed to Warsaw to sign an agreement between the US and Poland under which US anti-missile systems and American troops will be stationed in Poland. The Bush administration publicly portrays the deployment as directed against Iran, but it is well understood—and said openly by Polish officials—that the real target is Russia.

En route to Europe, Rice told reporters that the military action against Georgia was a “very dangerous game and perhaps one the Russians want to reconsider.” Evoking the rhetoric of the Cold War, she said the US and its NATO allies would not allow Russia to draw a “new line” through Europe.

At a press briefing with Rice at his ranch in Texas before her departure, President Bush made his most provocative comments yet on the unfolding crisis. While characterizing the ceasefire as “a hopeful step,” he flatly rejected any consideration of the sentiments of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two small territories which have been effectively independent of Georgia for more than a decade, and whose people are opposed to any return to Georgian rule.

“A major issue is Russia’s contention that the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia may not be part of Georgia’s future,” he said. “There’s no room for debate on this matter... The international community is clear that South Ossetia and Abkhazia are part of Georgia and the US fully recognizes this reality.”

The same was true of Kosovo’s status as part of Serbia. However, the US government and the European Union rode roughshod over such considerations, recognizing the declaration of independence by the US-backed regime in Kosovo earlier this year, over vociferous protests by Serbia and Russia.

The propaganda barrage directed largely at US public opinion continues in the American media. On Sunday and Monday there were reports of Russian forces digging in or even expanding their grip on parts of Georgia in deliberate defiance of the ceasefire agreement, which calls for Russian troops to withdraw back to the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The actual situation on the ground is far more complex than the picture presented on US television screens, with indications that most Russian troops have left Gori, the central Georgian city that served as

the military base for Georgian forces in the attack on South Ossetia August 7-8 that triggered the crisis. The US television network ABC reported Monday on its web site, “One indication that some Russians may have been pulled back was a Georgian army barracks in Gori which was full of Russian soldiers on Sunday, but was nearly deserted today except for a lone tank standing guard.”

While some Russian tanks left Gori on the road towards Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, and crashed through a blockade of Georgian police cars, they then veered off to the north, taking a road that would bring them back to the Russian side of the Caucasus Mountains.

The Russian military appears to be systematically destroying the Georgian military infrastructure in the areas that it controls as part of its preparation to pull back—a fact cited repeatedly by Georgian officials themselves. In the occupied town of Senaki, near Abkhazia, Russian forces reportedly blew up the runway using captured Georgian military supplies.

The Russian state news agency reported small convoys of five to ten tanks moving north through the Roki tunnel that connects the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali with neighboring North Ossetia, an autonomous republic in Russia.

Russian officials reiterated the plans for withdrawal. Deputy chief of staff Col.-Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn told a press briefing Monday that “today, according to the peace plan, the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers and reinforcements has begun.”

French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner, who accompanied President Nicolas Sarkozy on his trip to Moscow and Tbilisi which resulted in the ceasefire agreement, said in Paris Monday that it appeared “we are witnessing the start” of the Russian withdrawal.

Senator Joseph Biden, the Democrat who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, returned Monday from a weekend trip to Georgia in which he met with President Mikheil Saakashvili and other top officials. Echoing the Bush administration campaign to demonize Russia—and serving as an unofficial spokesman for the Obama campaign—Biden declared, “Russia’s actions in Georgia will have consequences.”

He called for \$1 billion in emergency US aid to Georgia, adding, “I left the country convinced that Russia’s invasion of Georgia may be one of the most significant events to occur in Europe since the end of communism.”

Lengthy accounts of the events leading up to the eruption of open warfare on August 7-8 were published by the *Washington Post* Sunday, the *New York Times* Monday, and the *Wall Street Journal*, all of them adhering to the Bush administration line that US officials were unaware of the Georgian assault on South Ossetia until after it happened, and tried to discourage Saakashvili from his evident determination to provoke a military confrontation with Russia.

A constant theme of these media accounts, and of Bush administration propaganda as a whole, is that no one should point an

accusing finger at Saakashvili for starting the war because Russia was guilty of a “disproportionate response.”

Saakashvili admittedly ordered Georgian troops to conquer South Ossetia, unleashing an artillery barrage that included the indiscriminate use of Grad rockets on the center of Tshkinvali, a town of 10,000 people. The Russian counterattack quickly routed the Georgian forces and Russian Army troops moved out of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia to destroy the main nearby bases of the Georgian military.

The charge of “disproportionate use of force” has been voiced by Rice, Bush and numerous other spokesmen for the Bush administration and the US military. It is a remarkable formulation, coming from a government which has regularly engaged in the military destruction of small and defenseless countries.

American imperialism has carried out one exercise in the “disproportionate use of force” after another over the past 25 years. Just to cite the most brazen:

- * 1983: The armed forces of the United States (population 280 million) invaded the island of Grenada (population 80,000), to overthrow the government of the nationalist New Jewel Movement.

- * 1984-87: The US government financed and armed the contra guerrilla forces attacking Nicaragua, amid a right-wing propaganda campaign portraying the tiny Central American republic (population 4 million) as the spearhead of Soviet-backed aggression against the entire Western Hemisphere.

- * 1989: Under Bush’s father, the United States invaded Panama (population 2.2 million) to overthrow and arrest its president, General Manuel Noriega, a longtime CIA collaborator who had fallen afoul of Washington.

- * 1991: The US led a massive attack force to dislodge Iraqi troops from Kuwait, entering southern Iraq and initiating a decade of sanctions punctuated by air attacks on Iraqi territory.

- * 1992-1993: Under the senior Bush, and then his successor, Democrat Bill Clinton, the US deployed thousands of Marines in Somalia (population 3 million), allegedly to fight famine, in actuality to pursue US geopolitical interests in the strategic Horn of Africa.

- * 1995-1999: The United States intervened repeatedly in the former Yugoslavia, first in Bosnia, then in Kosovo, in the course of which President Clinton ordered the intensive bombing of Serbia—which had no air force and only minimal air defenses—for more than ten weeks.

- * In the Middle East, American policy for decades has been to support the state of Israel, whose military strategy against the Palestinian people and the neighboring Arab states virtually defines “disproportionate response.” In 2006, Israel responded to a border skirmish with the Hezbollah militia by invading south Lebanon and bombing much of the country for two months, then distributing hundreds of thousands of mines and bomblets throughout the countryside in an effort to make the region uninhabitable.

- * The war in Iraq that was launched in 2003 cannot be characterized as a “disproportionate response,” only because it was not a “response” at all, but rather a unilateral act of military aggression against a country that had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the pretext for the US invasion and occupation.

The war in Iraq flowed from a more general military strategy outlined by the Bush administration in September 2002, just as Bush and Cheney were beating the war drums against Iraq. It enshrined what might be called the ultimate doctrine of “disproportionate response,” the policy of preventive war.

According the National Security Strategy document adopted by the

Pentagon and the White House, no state would be allowed to challenge the military supremacy of the United States in the twenty-first century, and the US government would be justified in launching a war to forestall such a possibility from arising.

The document called for the United States to build up such an overwhelming military power as to be “beyond challenge” and to “dissuade future military competition.” It added ominously that if such a threat should emerge, “we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively.”

This document was renewed in 2006, at which time the Bush administration declared that, according to “long-standing principles of self-defense,” the United States does not “rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack.”

In other words, “self-defense” did not require any attack on the US at all, or even any evidence that an attack was contemplated.

This language was accompanied by more-or-less generalized threats against Iran and the broader Middle East, Afghanistan, Venezuela and the people of Latin America as a whole, Russia and China—perhaps half the population of the world.

The reckless program of world-wide aggression outlined by the Bush administration has been largely supported by the Democrats in Congress and the Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, whose major criticism of the war in Iraq is that it has diverted the US from deploying American military forces against other potential targets.

Compared to the eruption of American militarism, the Russian intervention in Georgia, however reactionary and chauvinist the policies and aims of the regime in Moscow, is a relatively small-scale affair—some 15,000 troops, deployed for a week, and now beginning to pull back. Meanwhile, the American media barely reports the daily death toll inflicted by more than 200,000 US and allied troops deployed in Afghanistan for nearly seven years and in Iraq for more than five.



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