

Georgia's PM warns of World War III, as political tensions grip country

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Political tensions continue to roil the country of Georgia, where the government was recently forced to withdraw a law that would have required organizations and media outlets receiving 20 percent or more of their financing from abroad to declare themselves “foreign agents.”

The bill provoked mass protests in the nation's capital city, Tbilisi, where demonstrators carrying Ukrainian and EU flags demanded the legislation be withdrawn. They denounced the administration of Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili for being pro-Russian and aping the government of Vladimir Putin, which has imposed similar laws.

On Tuesday, Garibashvili warned that the war in nearby Ukraine is on the verge of becoming a global conflagration and raised questions about his government's ability to “maintain peace, stability.”

“Today the world is facing the threat of World War III. This estimate is not exaggerated, it is not speculation. We are witnessing further confrontation, tension and escalation every day,” said Garibashvili. His “main concern,” he added, is to “save the country.”

Georgia, a tiny nation with a population of just 3.7 million located in the south Caucasus, has long been the object of imperialist meddling, with the US and the EU today seeing it as critical to destabilizing Russia. Moscow, which waged brutal wars in the 1990s and 2000s to reassert federal control over the Russian region of Chechnya just to Georgia's north, is well aware of the dangers posed to it by the ongoing efforts of Washington and Brussels to bring Tbilisi firmly under their domination.

The current Georgian government, while maintaining close ties with NATO and seeking EU membership, refused to completely sever relations with Russia after the latter's invasion of Ukraine. It also has not signed

onto the full raft of international sanctions imposed on its giant neighbor to the north and east.

Georgia continues to allow Russians visa-free entry into the country. The government in Tbilisi recently floated the possibility of resuming direct flights to major Russian cities. The proposition provoked sharp condemnations from Washington, which has managed to almost entirely seal off Russia's western border.

While there is widespread hostility to the deeply antidemocratic character of the “foreign agents” law that Garibashvili's government sought to impose, the demonstrations that took place in Georgia in early March were not simply a spontaneous expression of popular outrage, but a politically orchestrated challenge led by the pro-US, right-wing United National Movement (UNM) to Tbilisi's somewhat more moderated approach to Russia.

The UNM has called for another antigovernment demonstration on April 9. The choice of date is carefully timed, as it is the 34-year anniversary of the Soviet government's use of force to crush pro-independence demonstrations in Georgia. Twenty-one people died and dozens more were injured on that date.

The more decisively pro-Western wing within the Georgian ruling elite is clearly trying to use the commemoration of the event, which is now observed as a national holiday, to stoke anti-Russian sentiment.

Yesterday, speaking at a press conference held with his Armenian counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the West of trying to alienate Russia from its neighbors and foment another “color revolution” in Georgia with the aid of “nongovernmental organizations.”

In 2003, the so-called “Rose Revolution” saw the ouster of a Russian-allied government in Georgia in favor of one led by Mikheil Saakashvili, who can only

be described as an American stooge. He was himself later driven from power due to corruption, brutality, and the imposition of policies that led to the impoverishment of the population.

While Lavrov's denunciations of Western meddling are not driven by the slightest concern for the rights of ordinary people in Georgia, the US has indeed been funneling hundreds of millions of dollars to various "civil society organizations" in the small Black Sea nation.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), just one of dozens of governmental and nongovernment agencies that orchestrate American policy overseas, proudly declares on its website: "USAID began operating in Georgia in 1992. For 27 years, the American people have provided over \$1.8 billion in assistance to Georgia through USAID. Building on this successful partnership, the U.S. Government dedicates approximately \$40 million annually to 50 wide-reaching programs that support Georgia's democratic, free-market, Western orientation."

Obviously, USAID has not been handing over boatloads of money to various "partners" in Georgia for nearly thirty years out of selfless magnanimity.

In the aftermath of the withdrawal of the "foreign agents" law by the Georgian government on March 10, the EU and the US have simultaneously sought to increase pressure on Tbilisi and shore up relations with it. For its part, the Georgian government is clearly flailing about trying to, on the one hand, appease Western powers and, on the other, avoid being crushed by the US-NATO war drive against Russia.

On March 17, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly held a press conference with his Georgian counterpart in which he insisted that relations between the two countries were vital to security, firm and steadfast. In an obvious reference to Russian influence in Georgia, Britain, he claimed, seeks to strengthen Georgian democracy against "those who seek to undermine it."

Just a few days later, Georgia held meetings with representatives from Brussels about the south Caucasian country's ongoing bid to become a member of the EU, which it formally initiated last year. The EU recently issued a series of conditions that Georgia must meet in order to gain admittance. All of them, on the

alleged basis of "ending corruption," "promoting democracy," and "deoligarchizing," involve imposing one or another right-wing economic reform, bringing Georgia's political and legal system more firmly under the control of Brussels, or pushing out Russian-allied oligarchs in Georgia in favor of European-allied ones.

Parallel to these negotiations are ongoing discussions regarding military and security ties between the EU and Georgia, which sits along a portion of the Black Sea's eastern coast.

Washington, which cheered the antigovernment demonstrations in Georgia in early March, is playing the "human rights" card in its effort to exert pressure on the Garibashvili administration. On March 20, the US Department of State released a report identifying "serious problems" with Georgia's judiciary and approach towards freedom of the press.

Prime Minister Garibashvili dismissed the allegations as "speculations and conclusions and reports based on false, fabricated information provided by politically engaged, biased individuals."

In recent weeks, other politicians from the ruling Georgian Dream party have raised the prospect of the overthrow of the sitting government. On March 17, the mayor of Tbilisi and a leading figure in the organization, Kakha Kaladze, accused the former United National Movement Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili and UNM Chair Levan Khabeishvili of seeking to stage "a confrontation, a revolution, a coup."

The People's Power party, which is made up of former members of the Georgian Dream party, also released a statement last week describing the protests in early March as being "in the interests of other countries" and intended to drag Georgia "onto the path of war."



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