

NATO-backed protests in Georgia raise prospect of another “color revolution” in south Caucasus

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17 May 2024

Protests against the final passage of a “foreign agents law” in the country of Georgia erupted again this week in the capital city, Tbilisi. The bill, which requires that organizations that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from overseas register as representing the interests of a foreign power, was approved on its final reading this Tuesday in a parliamentary session held under heavy guard. While President Salome Zourabichvili will veto the measure, its supporters have enough votes to overturn her decision.

Opponents claim that the law is the handiwork of the Kremlin. The Russian government implemented a similar measure several years ago, and the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party is labeled as pro-Moscow. Demonstrators are holding aloft signs that read, “F**k Putin,” “Slaves,” “Russians.” The US and the EU have both denounced the country’s government for allying itself with Russia.

This week’s mass gatherings, according to Western press reports, are in the “tens of thousands.” Video clips show riot police, outfitted with batons, shields, and tear gas, pushing back against crowds and violently dragging people away. Several dozen have been arrested, including two US citizens and one Russian citizen. Demonstrators have blocked major intersections and set up encampments in the city center. Students at numerous universities staged a one-day strike on May 14.

The same day, demonstrators attempted to breach barriers and enter the parliament building, where a physical fight involving a dozen or more lawmakers had broken out. They intended to join the fray in an effort to stop or reverse the vote on the law.

Events unfolding in the small but geo-strategically important south Caucasus nation bear the markings of a looming “color revolution.” Over the course of the 2000s, US and NATO-backed demonstrations in former Soviet-sphere countries, always labeled as “pro-democracy” movements, repeatedly overthrew governments deemed to be aligned with Russia. These operations adopted different colors, with Georgia itself having a “Rose Revolution” in 2003.

The “color revolutions” were invariably based on privileged layers of the middle class and brought to power an openly pro-NATO faction of the oligarchy which subsequently implemented devastating market reforms and oppressed all opposition. Georgia’s “Rose Revolution” president, Mikheil Saakashvili, ultimately had to flee to Ukraine to evade charges of corruption and the violent abuse of prisoners. There he was protected by Kiev’s far-right government, which was brought to power through similar events.

The protests in Tbilisi, which have been ongoing for weeks, come in the lead-up to parliamentary elections in October. The NGOs,

opposition parties, and “civil society” activists orchestrating the street demonstrations seek to press Georgian Dream into retreat and a more subservient relationship with the US or, should that not work, to drive it from power. Speaking to CNN, former Georgian Ambassador to the EU Natalie Sabanadze stated, “If this government doesn’t withdraw this bill now, when they still have the chance, it will be hard for them to get to the elections. It’s a spiral at the moment.”

The US and the EU have responded ferociously to the passage of the foreign agents law, which could expose much of Georgia’s network of “civil society,” “pro-democracy,” “human rights” organizations to be US and EU-funded fronts.

US Assistant Secretary of State Jim O’Brien warned Tuesday that the country had now reached a “turning point” and implied that it will no longer be considered an American ally. In an admission of the fact that the US has spent billions of dollars meddling in Georgia, O’Brien indicated that Washington is preparing to cut off financing for the current government, which is “now regarded as an adversary and not a partner.”

The EU, which Georgia has been seeking to join, indicated that it will halt the process of admitting the south Caucasus nation to its ranks. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi declared in a statement that the law is “not in line with EU core norms and values.”

UK Minister for Europe Nusrat Ghani promised—as if it were up to her—that the people of Georgia will “rally against this law as long as it takes.” She warned, menacingly, that the bill against foreign agents was an “existential threat” to the country’s survival.

In an extraordinary breach of diplomatic protocol, the foreign ministers of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Iceland—countries that do nothing that they are not told to do by Washington and Brussels—went to Tbilisi on Wednesday and joined the marches. Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna boasted of his presence there, posting footage of himself striding along with protesters on his X page. This would be the equivalent of Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Aleinik showing up at the antigovernment demonstrations in Washington and taking selfies.

The ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party, after years of attempting to ingratiate itself with Washington and Brussels while still retaining ties with Russia, finds itself trapped. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, who blamed NATO expansion for provoking the war in Ukraine, refers to the Western alliance as the “global party of war.” He expresses fears within the Georgian ruling elite, which are held more broadly in the population, of what is in store for them.

However, as over a decade of ever-closer relations with the White House and the EU show, if Georgian Dream could come to some sort of livable arrangement with the US and its allies, it would. And the US continues to try to establish its control over the “pro-Russian” forces in the south Caucasus. Assistant Secretary of State O’Brien, who arrived in Tbilisi this week, sought to meet with the party’s billionaire financier, Bidzina Ivanishvili. He has thus far reportedly been turned down.

The ruling party has long tried to chart a middle road between the US and Russia, but the basis for such a balancing act has been almost completely undermined by the escalating conflict between NATO and Russia in Ukraine and the preparations for a direct conflict against Iran in the Middle East.

In the fall of last year, the country’s security services reported uncovering a plot, funded by the West, to overthrow the government. The “foreign agents law” emerges within this context. Its immediate targets are organizations and forces tied to the US and NATO, which sections of the Georgian elite fear are preparing to dispense with them.

This does not, however, make the bill any less reactionary. Similar measures have been used to target socialists and other groups deemed to be too left-wing. Currently, Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk—a fighter against imperialism and both Russian and Ukrainian nationalism—is jailed in Ukraine on trumped-up charges of being a “foreign agent” of the Kremlin.

However, the protests in Georgia are devoid of progressive content. The slogans advanced at the demonstration—for “freedom,” “democracy,” a “European future,” and against “Russian slaves”—amount to the demand that Georgia transform itself into a complete puppet of the American and European ruling classes and that it become yet another staging ground for war against Russia.

This can only result in catastrophe. The future that awaits Georgia in the event of another imperialist-backed “revolution” can be seen in Ukraine, where a far-right, CIA-run government has driven the population into a bloodbath in the West’s proxy war against Russia. All opposition to the government is violently suppressed. Fascist hagiography has become the ideology of the Ukrainian state.

The interest of the US and its NATO allies in Georgia has nothing to do with democracy and everything to do with advancing its strategic and economic interests in an emerging new imperialist redivision of the world. For decades, Western militaries and spy agencies have been building up ties with the country. In 2015, a NATO Joint Training and Evaluation Center was established there. In 2018 the US Army set up the Georgian Defense Readiness Program. American military leaders have spoken repeatedly about the centrality of the country to their war aims.

The region is also valuable as a mean of circumventing Russian control over major trade and energy routes. Western powers have been centrally involved in financing several critical projects—the building of a deeper water Black Sea port at Anaklia, the construction of an electrical line from Georgia to the EU that would deliver renewable-resource electricity to the European market, and the laying of an east-west fiber optic cable that ties together Asia and Europe, bypassing Russia.

The social and political character of the Tbilisi demonstrations is further revealed in the absence of slogans having to do with poverty, inequality, job security, overwork, inflation, or any of the other problems that occupy the overwhelming majority of the working class. These issues are not raised because for those on the streets they are not a major concern.

The anti-Russian sentiment spewing out of protesters is also bound up with middle-class resentments over the huge influx of well-to-do Russians into the country after the start of the Ukraine war. Tens of thousands have emigrated to their southern neighbor over the last two years, driving up prices and for real estate and luxury items. The layers coming to 3.7 million have resources; they could not have emigrated unless they worked for foreign firms, had ample savings in foreign accounts, or had the connections necessary to set themselves up comfortably in a new country. In other words, they have already achieved what Georgia’s middle class, stuck in a country with a Gross National Income per capita that is among the lowest in Europe, seeks—or if they have it, they want more of it.

While economic and social demands are absent from the demonstrations, militaristic patriotism abounds. A May 10 article in Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) noted, for instance, “Georgian flags are ubiquitous at the demonstrations.” The US-funded news service went on to highlight the political outlook of law student Zviad Tsetskhladze, “who helped start the student marches” and “is one of the leaders of a youth group called Dafioni (‘Sunset’), which has come to prominence during these protests.”

“The group,” reports the press outlet, “raised eyebrows at one early protest by having members swear an oath to ‘defend Georgia’s statehood... In Tsetskhladze’s Facebook profile photo, he is wearing camouflage military gear, complete with a balaclava” and reports that he “love(s) military stuff.” He described fellow students as supporters of pro-Western and “libertarian” parties.

And amidst mass demonstrations throughout the world in opposition to the brutality of the Zionist state and its backers on both sides of the Atlantic, the protesters in Tbilisi have nothing to say about the mass arrest and beating up of pro-Palestinian demonstrators around the world, much less the slaughter of an entire people in Gaza.

Rather, the demonstrators in Tbilisi chanting the worn-out formulas of “democracy” and demanding a “European path” are celebrating those directly responsible for genocide. These positions are not actually in contradiction with one another. The efforts to install a pliant pro-NATO government in Georgia is a necessary component of the emerging new imperialist world war, which has already transformed Ukraine and Palestine into killing fields.



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