

Georgia's war against Russia: 'Wag the Dog' Part II

Written by Eric Walberg

Was an independent Ossetia inevitable after Kosovo or is it a US election ruse gone wrong, asks Eric Walberg

4/9/8 -- Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin gave a gritty, straight-talking 30-minute interview with CNN this week in Russian. It was not translated or reported on widely in the US media, which is a shame. He charged that US military personnel were in South Ossetia during the attack, and lectured about such topics as Ossetia's long membership in the Russian empire (since 1801) and Ossetians' age-old resentment of Georgian chauvinism, especially following the 1917 Russian revolution and the 1990 declaration of Georgian independence. A South Ossetian legislator has already mooted the possibility that it will eventually become part of the Russian Federation.

When asked by CNN if he would stop threatening neighbours now that the Ossetian crisis was over, he angrily dismissed the question as preposterous, saying it was up to the US and its new Eastern European clients to stop threatening Russia. It is the Polish and Czech missile bases and Ukrainian and Georgian pretenses to join in the nuclear-tipped encirclement of Russia that are the destabilising developments forcing Russia to batten the hatches. The Russians see the bases as a precursor to a much larger system that would undermine the already seriously eroded Russian nuclear deterrent. "For the first time in history -- and I want to emphasise this -- there will be elements of the US nuclear capability on the European continent. It simply changes the whole configuration of international security. Of course, we have to respond to that," said Putin at a press conference last year which was also not reported in the mainstream US media.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov underlined Putin's words Monday, referring to "the reality of the post-America world" and warning that "in the absence of a reasonable multilateral dialogue we will be forced to react unilaterally." Europe's inability to produce a new collective security system, "open for everyone and taking into account everyone's interests," was to blame for the Georgia crisis. He added: "There is a feeling that NATO again needs frontline states to justify its existence."

As if to make his point, the Russian military carried out a successful test of a Topol RS-12M nuclear capable stealth rocket from the Plesetsk space centre. Analysts are already speculating that Putin (OK, Medvedev) may well "take out" the Polish missile site. "He has no other option. The proposed system integrates the entire US nuclear arsenal into one operational-unit a mere 115 miles from the Russian border. It's no different than Khrushchev's plan to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba in the 1960s," writes Mike Whitney at Online Journal. At the very least he "will be forced to raise the stakes and send warplanes over the construction site. That is the logical first-step that any responsible leader would take before removing the site altogether." So if Cold War II keeps accelerating and something like this

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happens later this year, what should we make of it? Is this Russia threatening and even invading its neighbour, or is it a justifiable warning to the US to back down from its attempts to instigate WWII?

Is it possible that all this furfural is really just an early "October Surprise", in the US electoral tradition that both Reagan and Bush II made such masterful use of? Recall that Ronald Reagan's advisors orchestrated a delay in returning US hostages from Iran in 1980, tipping the balance in his favour in the elections that year. President George W Bush got a letter purportedly from Osama bin Laden weeks before the elections in 2004, conveniently reminding Americans that he is their defender against terrorists. This was the inspiration for the 1998 movie Wag the Dog, where a few weeks before the elections, a presidential advisor hires a Hollywood producer to fabricate and market a war in an ex-socialist bloc country (Albania) and ensure the incumbent's re-election.

In the current "reality show" version, discretion is thrown completely to the wind, with a certain Randy Scheunemann playing both doctor and advisor to Republican "incumbent" Senator John McCain. Scheunemann's two-man Orion Strategies lobby firm has been advising Latvia since 2001 and more recently, Georgia. Georgia hopes to follow Latvia's success in joining NATO and -- why not? -- the European Union. It has already paid Orion Strategies \$300,000 to this end.

Putin firmly declared in his CNN interview that the attack on Russian peacekeepers by Georgia was given the green light by US officials as part of a US election campaign ploy. He was most likely referring to McCain, a personal friend of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, and Scheunemann, McCain's chief foreign policy advisor. Or possibly Joseph Wood, Cheney's deputy assistant for national security affairs, who was in Georgia shortly before the war began. Or both.

But Putin is caught between a rock and a hard place in this US election year. Even if he's right about Scheunemann, McCain's advisor has his counterpart in Senator Barack Obama's chief foreign policy advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who while being no fan of Bush, is rubbing his hands in glee over the Russian move to protect Ossetia. So whoever wins in November will undoubtedly push WWII into high gear, come what may.

Will this "Wag the Dog" Part II bring in the votes for McCain? That is far from certain considering his admiration for the now-despised Bush, his endless gaffes and his patent lack

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of intelligence. However, the key to US elections -- the Israeli lobby -- is not happy with Brzezinski, and could scuttle Obama's candidacy, despite Obama's choice of self-proclaimed Zionist Senator Joe Biden as his running mate. Recall that Brzezinski was foreign policy advisor to ex-president Jimmy Carter, whose Camp David accords forced Israel to give the Sinai back to Egypt .

Enter Scheunemann. He has no such skeletons in his closet. And he is a big fan of the current Middle East make-over designed to ensure Israeli supremacy. As director of Chalabi's Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, he pushed for the invasion in 2003. Mission accomplished, he found his new warrior prince in Tbilisi. Scheunemann is just one of dozens of US and Israeli advisors to the trigger-happy Georgian president. Israel has been actively supporting Saakashvili, eager to see the Georgian pipeline project bypassing Russia completed. Georgian Defence Minister Davit Kezerashvili and Minister of Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili are both Israeli citizens who returned to Georgia to enter politics.

If in fact the US Israeli lobby has decided on McCain for president, and passed the word on to Scheunemann, this could well account for the green light that Saakashvili clearly thought he had to attack Russian peacekeeping troops and Ossetia civilians, killing hundreds if not the 1,500 claimed by Russia. And what better way to force both candidates to shore up Bush's policy of war and death, just in case by some fluke the suspicious Obama overcomes the many hurdles to a candidate not enjoying the full confidence (i.e., control) of "the lobby".

You can't fault Obama for trying to please them, short of firing his patron Brzezinski. Already, he has dropped his willingness to talk to "the enemy", which clearly means Russia these days, every bit as much as Iran. Under him, Iraq will keep its US bases and Afghanistan will absorb any troops who leave Iraq. Whether or not Washington succeeds in bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO is the only moot point in all this, and this really depends more on Russia than on who inhabits the White House for the next four years.

This is all very much like Brzezinski's scheming as advisor to president Carter. He now boasts that by orchestrating US funding of Islamic extremists like bin Laden from 1979 on, he was responsible for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. This did nothing to wag Carter's dog back into power in 1980, but that is of little consequence to these shadowy advisors, who are never without work in the higher echelons of US politics, just as Scheunemann will not suffer in the least if his candidate is found to have Alzheimer's and forgets to show for his inauguration next January. And if Obama wins, he will merely cede his White House pass to Brzezinski and continue advising world leaders such as the hapless Georgian president.

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It's quite possible that this ratcheting up of tensions in the Caucasus is intentional. It clinched the Polish missile deal in a hurry and put Russia in a bad light, giving succour to those planning to make the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline the key link in a network bypassing Russia. But the Georgian pipeline was shut down by BP during the recent conflict, and it is far from clear that spin doctors and tweaking the Russian bear's nose will bring the US any closer to cutting Russia down to size. What this episode and Putin's steely evaluation did was to further expose the poison at the heart of American politics and confirm the world's suspicions that Russia is not afraid to stand up for itself.

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/913/in2.htm>