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Georgia: A New Caucasus War Could Be Part of Biden's Unfinished Business

For well over a decade the White House, the State Department, the Defense Department and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have been jointly preparing Georgia and Ukraine for NATO membership. Throughout that process one of the main architects and executors of the policy has been Joseph Biden, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and later as vice president. To become full NATO members the two nations can have neither unresolved territorial conflicts in their nations – or what they claim to be their nations – nor foreign (non-NATO) military forces on their soil. As the world watches Washington edge toward direct military conflict with Russia over Ukraine, it should keep a close eye on what may be planned as a second front. In both cases President Biden has what he may consider unfinished business to attend to. (A twofold confrontation in which NATO powerhouse Turkey, fresh from a war against a so-called frozen conflict state in the former Soviet Union, about which more below, is almost certainly to play a part.)

In what is indicative of burgeoning military ties between the Pentagon and the NATO on the one hand and the small Caucasus nation of Georgia on the other, NATO has presented Georgia with its latest iteration of the NATO-Georgia Substantial Package initiated in 2014. This occurred two weeks after General Christopher Cavoli, commander of U.S. Army Europe and Africa, paid a three-day visit to the nation. Less than a week before that Georgian Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze met with the head of the NATO Liaison

Office in Georgia, Rosaria Puglisi. Something is afoot in the country where the South Caucasus meets the Black Sea.

Georgia attacked the former Soviet autonomous republic of South Ossetia, planning to do the same against another former autonomous republic, Abkhazia, on the Black Sea, in August of 2008, which triggered a five-day war with Russia. Within a few days of that war ending Joseph Biden, at the time Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, was the first major U.S. official to visit the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to both succor and reward the vanquished aggressor in the recently-concluded war. He told the Georgian government the U.S. backed its claims against Abkhazia and South Ossetia, pledging support for their subjugation. That is, he promised Washington's help in achieving what Georgian (U.S.-educated and former U.S. resident) President Mikheil Saakashvili failed to accomplish by invading South Ossetia and going to war with Russia: the subjugation of the two small republics. (Attempting to replicate his success in subduing the Autonomous Republic of Adjara immediately after his "Rose Revolution" – which Biden praised while in Tbilisi – in early 2004 with a show of military force which ran the risk at the time of provoking an armed confrontation with Russia, which had peacekeepers in the republic. The Adjara president, Aslan Abashidze, fled to Moscow where deposed former presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, Askar Akayev and Viktor Yanukovich, also reside.

Back in Washington, in words that might have made his soon-to-be presidential running mate's rival John McCain appear a diplomat, he said: "I left the country convinced that Russia's invasion of Georgia may be the one of the most significant event to occur in Europe since the end of communism....The war that began in Georgia is no longer about that country alone. It has become a question of whether and how the West will stand up for the rights of free people throughout the region."

A new crusade, a new Cold War. One that he has resumed thirteen years later.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which may soon reemerge as geopolitical bones of contention, are two of four states that since 1991 have been referred to as frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union. The others are Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria. Georgia claims the first two, Azerbaijan the third and Moldova the last. The U.S. and NATO strongly back their military partners Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova in their claims. What is never mentioned in the West, though, is that Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova

only have supposed claims on Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniester because the latter four were autonomous republics (or equivalents) within the Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and not because of any independent or preexisting possession of them. (Let's see the New York Times get that into a headline.) Only in that context can the three NATO partners lay claim to the four independent republics, a context which has not been extant or relevant for the past thirty years. Moldova, for example, never existed as a nation until 1991. In the Soviet constitution autonomous republics could secede from union republics just as union republics could secede from the central government, as all fifteen did in 1991.

In the present unparalleled worsening of relations between the U.S. and NATO on one side, Russia on the other, it is inevitable that the two former will support moves by their Georgian, Azerbaijani and Moldovan military partners to appropriate Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniester. Perhaps at the same time. Russia has troops in all but Nagorno-Karabakh. Transdniester is surrounded by Moldova on one side, Ukraine on the other, with NATO member Romania viewing Moldova as Turkey does Azerbaijan; that is, as "one nation, two states." A majority of Moldovans are ethnic Romanians and Bucharest wouldn't object to swallowing the fish that swallows Transdniester, so to speak. In that event Moldova and Transdniester alike would join NATO in the manner the German Democratic Republic did in 1989: through absorption.

To return to Biden's visit to post-war Georgia in 2008. At the time he was in the running to be Democratic Party presidential nominee Barack Obama's vice presidential running mate. Obama's Republican rival was John McCain, than whom no more fanatical and bellicose Russophobe has ever existed. Biden would shortly afterward be chosen for the above role in no small part to provide "balance" to foreign-policy-inexperienced (as in someone who had not yet launched or masterminded wars) Obama, especially in relation to McCain.

Biden proved his mettle in Tbilisi. He came bearing both guns and butter to employ the expression of the Vietnam War era. In characteristic Bidenese – always pugnacious, always abrasive, always vulgar – he fired this salvo at Russia, only a few days after its first war since that in Afghanistan: "Russia's actions in Georgia will have consequences....Russia's failure to keep its word and withdraw troops from Georgia risks

the country's standing as part of the international community. That is not the future the United States or Europe want – but it is the future Russia may get.”

Informed readers will note that he has never abandoned that confrontational and demeaning tone toward Russia. When he returned to Washington he said, “When Congress reconvenes, I intend to work with the administration to seek Congressional approval for \$1 billion in emergency assistance for Georgia, with a substantial down payment on that aid to be included in the Congress’ next supplemental spending bill.” That amount of money went a long way in a nation that at the time had a population of only 3.5 million.

Ten months later Biden returned to Georgia where he addressed the parliament, for the world as an imperial viceroy, a role he would reprise five years later in Ukraine after the coup had succeeded and the war begun there, and said the following concerning his trip the preceding August:

“One year ago, as the Speaker referenced, I came to Georgia under very different circumstances. I was advised by many not to come. I was told that it wasn’t a particularly opportune moment. But I wanted to make clear why your independence was so important to my country and the world. Instead of standing in your parliament, I sat on the rooftop of a restaurant with President Saakashvili, as the sound of artillery fire and fighter aircraft punctuated the night.

“On that rooftop, I pledged America’s support to Georgia in my status as the United States Senator. And I here today pledge it again, as Vice President of the United States of America. I pledge it not only on my behalf, but on behalf of President Barack Obama.”

How much of the above is apocryphal shouldn’t be a matter of too much conjecture.

He further stated: “We understand that Georgia aspires to join NATO. We fully support that aspiration. And, members of Parliament, we will work to help you meet the standards of NATO membership.”

To fall into line with Biden’s promise and Biden’s threats, Washington launched the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership within months of the August 2008 war.

Barely a month after the Georgian-Russian war ended, NATO established a NATO–Georgia Commission.

At roughly the same time Washington also set up a U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership and Brussels a NATO–Ukraine Commission.

Earlier in 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania NATO declared Georgia and Ukraine would join the military bloc as full members after meeting the required criteria. Senators Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and John McCain, at the time presidential contenders, sent out press releases, in identical language, pledging their support for Georgia's and Ukraine's NATO membership.

Two obstacles, however, stood in the way of the countries joining NATO. NATO will not admit a nation that has unresolved territorial disputes on its soil or that hosts foreign (that is, non-NATO) military forces. Abkhazia and South Ossetia rejected Georgian claims on their lands and both republics had Russian peacekeepers within their borders. Russia has its Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol in Crimea. The world has seen how Georgia intended to remove the two impediments simultaneously in 2008, thereby clearing the way for NATO membership; we've seen how Ukraine attempted to eliminate its handicap in regard to Crimea in 2014.

In the post-Cold War expansion that has seen NATO's membership almost double since 1999, the bloc has most often incorporated nations in regional groups: in 1999 three of the four members of the Visegrad Four in Central Europe – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (Slovakia would have to wait another five years to be politically *purified*); in 2003 the three Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Black Sea neighbors Bulgaria and Romania. Georgia and Ukraine, Black Sea neighbors, have been coupled in that manner, as have Finland and Sweden. A variation could be grouping Georgia with fellow South Caucasus nations Armenia and Azerbaijan and Ukraine with Moldova. In any configuration the need to subjugate the four independent republics discussed above, almost certainly militarily, would be imperative for NATO membership.

To further build up Georgia's warfighting capacity, in 2014 NATO introduced its NATO-Georgia Substantial Package. It should be pointed out that Georgia was the largest non-NATO troop contributor to the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. When it invaded South

Ossetia in 2008 the Pentagon flew all 2,000 Georgian troops then in Iraq back to Georgia for the war against Russia.

NATO describes the military assistance program as follows: “The Substantial NATO-Georgia Package is a set of initiatives endorsed at the Wales Summit in September 2014 aimed at strengthening Georgia’s defenses and developing closer security cooperation and engagement with NATO members.”

Concerning the aforementioned meeting of the Georgian defense minister and NATO liaison officer in Georgia, Georgia’s Defense Ministry wrote:

“At the meeting, the issues of NATO-Georgia relations, implementation of the initiatives envisaged by the NATO-Georgia Renewed Substantial Package (SNGP Refresh) and Georgia’s contribution to the ongoing NATO-led Strong Support Mission [presumably the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan] were discussed.

“The Head of the NATO Liaison Office was briefed on the reforms carried out in the Ministry, the ongoing transformation process in the Defense Forces, important steps taken to increase compatibility with NATO and practical mechanisms for cooperation.”

The NATO-Georgia Renewed Substantial Package consists of “support at the strategic, tactical and operational levels across” in thirteen areas:

- 1) Acquisition
- 2) Strategic operational planning
- 3) Special operations forces
- 4) Military police
- 5) Cyber defense
- 6) Maritime security
- 7) Strategic communications
- 8) A Joint Training and Evaluation Centre
- 9) Logistic capability
- 10) Intelligence and communications
- 11) A Defence Institution Building School

12) Aviation and air defense

13) NATO-Georgia exercises in Georgia open to partners

It was a NATO partnership (Partnership for Peace/PfP) military exercise, U.S.-led Immediate Response with 1,000 U.S. Army and Marine personnel, in Georgia that immediately preceded the war of 2008.

In 2010 NATO's North Atlantic Council declared the Sachkhere Mountain Training School in Georgia to have attained the status of NATO Partnership for Peace Training and Educational Centre. It has since offered a "wide spectrum of international courses developed for the military servicemen of NATO member and partner countries in the framework of the PfP Program."

Last month NATO delivered the last of twenty military vehicles to Georgia at the [NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre \(JTEC\)](#). The handover ceremony was attended Deputy Defense Minister Georgia Zurab Azarashvili, Deputy Commander of Defense Forces Major General Zaza Chkhaidze, Deputy Head of the NATO Liaison Office Pirit Picker and representatives of the NATO Procurement and Services Agency.

The NATO-Georgian Joint Training and Evaluation Centre, established under the rubric of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, is, as NATO describes it, "designed to assist Georgia to reform, modernise and strengthen its security and defence sector; enhance the interoperability of Georgian Forces, enabling them to work alongside forces from NATO members and partners and offer multi-national training and exercise opportunities; and contribute to promoting regional stability in the Black Sea and Caucasus region."

Its headquarters are in Krtsanisi, where the Georgian Training and Military Education Command is also located. There are and will be other NATO JTEC facilities throughout the country, including a training area in Vaziani. The JTEC includes a Combat Training Centre, which is intended to "enhance the defence capabilities of the Georgian Armed Forces through training based on relevant threat scenarios." The JTEC was also set up by NATO to "become a regional hub for best practice in military training and evaluation, inviting military units from countries in the Black Sea region and Caucasus, to take part in regional exercises," and to "help facilitate joint exercises between troops from Georgia,

NATO and Partner Nations.” Georgia is NATO’s bridge between the Black Sea region and the Caucasus.

A leopard doesn’t change his spots, we’ve been told. And after almost half a century of saber-rattling, advocating and supporting wars around the world and, notwithstanding a change in political and socio-economic systems in Russia thirty years ago, retaining a pathological degree of Russophobia, neither has Biden. He has been as consistent and militant a Russophobe as even Zbigniew Brzezinski and John McCain ever were, and remains so now. The world can’t afford to pay the cost for indulging his dangerous obsession.

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