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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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07.04.2021

Ukraine, Georgia Offer Control of the Black Sea in Exchange for NATO Membership

Georgian English-language media reported on April 5 that their nation's head of government, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, took the occasion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's 72 anniversary to offer the military alliance an intriguing quid pro quo.

In exchange for being inducted into NATO as a full member ("The pursuit of NATO membership [is] Georgia's top foreign and security policy priority"), he would guarantee his nation would contribute to "the expansion of the Alliance towards the Black Sea," as that penetration and domination of an inland sea that includes Russia as a littoral state "is a necessary condition for European and world security." Hence, the proposed trade-off would be mutually beneficial as "NATO needs Georgia as much as we need it."

That the NATO anniversary occurred on a Sunday, and on Easter Sunday on the Gregorian calendar at that, meant nothing to the Georgian prime minister. NATO comes first, foremost and exclusively.

NATO of course has been in the Black Sea since Turkey joined the bloc in 1952 (after, with Greece, having earned its spurs by sending troops to fight in the Korean War). It later gained control of half the nations on the Black Sea by admitting Bulgaria and Romania in 2004. The Pentagon acquired eight new military bases, four in each nation, in the process.

Four years later at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania – only four years after the country became a NATO member, note, and only the second time a summit was held in a Black Sea nation (the 2004 summit was held in Istanbul, Turkey) – the alliance announced that fellow Black Sea nations Georgia and Ukraine would join as full members after meeting NATO standards.

Preconditions for joining NATO include the absence of unresolved territorial disputes and of foreign military presence within a candidate nation. Four months after NATO's assurance of its future membership the Georgian government of President Mikheil Saakashvili attempted to overcome both those barriers at one time by invading South Ossetia with [plans to then invade Abkhazia](#). Those two republics were formerly part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and Tbilisi still claims them as part of post-Soviet Georgia. The U.S. and NATO support those claims. In 2008 there were small contingents of Commonwealth of Independent States-mandated Russian peacekeepers in both locations. The Georgian-Russian war of 2008 was the result of Georgia attempting to qualify for NATO membership by invading and reincorporating Abkhazia (which is on the Black Sea) and South Ossetia and driving Russian troops out of those two states.

NATO and the U.S. have since regularly reiterated the invitation for Georgia and Ukraine to join the 30-nation military alliance.

In 2014 pro-NATO forces in Ukraine attempted to make their nation ready for NATO membership as well with the “Euromaidan” uprising and coup, directed by the Barack Obama administration with the bipartisan support of the likes of Senator John McCain. If not for Donetsk, Lugansk and Crimea refusing to recognize and submit to the post-coup junta and its violent, often openly neo-Nazi (for example, the Azov Battalion) storm troopers, there is little doubt that the autonomous status of Crimea would have been revoked and the Russian Black Sea Fleet, stationed in Sevastopol since 1783, would have been evicted. That so that the impediments to NATO membership would be removed.

On April 6 [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a phone conversation with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#) in which the first called on NATO to increase its presence in the Black Sea, leaving no doubt as to which sole Black Sea nation history's largest military bloc should be arrayed against there:

“Such a permanent presence should be a powerful deterrent to Russia, which continues the large-scale militarization of the region and hinders merchant shipping.”

The Ukrainian head of state went on to tell the NATO chief, “In recent weeks, we have seen a very dangerous tendency with an increase in the number of ceasefire violations by the Russian occupying forces and the number of Ukrainian defenders killed.”

On February 9 Stoltenberg had assured Ukraine that NATO would increase its support of Ukraine in the Black Sea, months before the current crisis.

Similarly, at NATO Headquarters on March 17, Stoltenberg and Prime Georgian Minister Garibashvili “addressed the security situation in the Black Sea region.”

The preceding day Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2), which consisted at the time of four ships, entered Georgian territorial waters to “enhance interoperability between naval forces by conducting joint exercises with the Georgian coast guards.”

On the deployment of the SNMG2 to the Black Sea four days earlier, its commander, Rear Admiral Manuel Aguirre Aldereguía, said: “Having three allied nations and two partners among the littoral countries, regular presence of a Standing Naval Force in the Black Sea region is a way for the Alliance to show presence in this area of responsibility, enhance interoperability between Allies and partners, demonstrate NATO’s commitment to Black Sea security....”

At the March 17 meeting the NATO chief criticized “Russia’s continued military build-up in the Black Sea” – this while the U.S. often has two guided-missile destroyers and the Pentagon and NATO boast of expanding their joint military presence there – and said, “We continue to call on Russia to end its recognition of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to withdraw its forces.”

It is necessary to recognize the true character of the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia and to understand the motives behind it. As with the war between Black Sea nations Georgia and Russia in 2008, but on a much grander, and more dangerous, scale, NATO is supporting Ukraine as it is Georgia – who they have always coupled for membership – to become NATO-qualified by driving Russia out of the Black Sea region.

The present fighting and military build-up in the Donbass region is the latest manifestation of a long-standing strategy.

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ANTI WAR COM 06.04.2021