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NATO maneuvers with Georgia, Ukraine threaten war with Russia

By Alex Lantier

3 April 2014

NATO is provocatively seeking to install its forces on Russia's borders, moving to recruit Georgia and Ukraine's unelected, pro-Western regime to the military alliance, a move that threatens a NATO-Russia war.

NATO and Georgian officials met yesterday in Brussels to plan talks on a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to admit Georgia into NATO as early as September.

“As a country aspiring to join our Alliance, Georgia is a special partner to NATO,” said NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. He also thanked Georgia for being “the largest non-NATO troop contributor to our mission in Afghanistan,” where Georgia has deployed 1,560 personnel to assist NATO in its bloody war of occupation.

Rasmussen’s special representative, James Appathurai, added: “Georgia will become a member of NATO, this policy has not changed, and no one wants to change it.”

“At the meeting of foreign ministers in June, we will examine the progress being made by all four candidate countries on the path of rapprochement with NATO,” he said, referring to Georgia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. “We will present a report related to this issue, and a decision to forward will be adopted at the summit.”

This is part of an aggressive military escalation by NATO, which is planning troop deployments and military exercises all along Russia's western borders—in Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Its moves to directly ally with Georgia, a country in the Caucasus that borders on Russia and attacked Russian forces in 2008, underscores the danger of a Russia-NATO war posed by this escalation.

The NATO meetings with Georgia followed comments by US Secretary of State John Kerry on Monday, signaling US interest in including both Ukraine and Georgia in NATO. He said, “The United States joins our allies in reaffirming that NATO's door remains open to any European country in a position to undertake the commitments and obligations of membership, and that can contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area.”

He did not explicitly mention Georgia or Ukraine, as some NATO countries, like Germany and France, reportedly still oppose rapidly admitting Georgia—a position they took amid the 2008 Georgian war provoked by US-backed Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's attack on Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, both Berlin and Paris backed the installation of an unelected pro-Western government in Ukraine in a fascist-led putsch in Kiev this February.

The Russian Foreign Ministry replied to Kerry by pointedly warning Ukraine not to join NATO. It said that previous discussions of membership in NATO “led to freezing of Russian-Ukrainian political communications, to headaches in the relationship between NATO and Russia and, what is the most dangerous, to the deepening of the split of Ukrainian society, the majority of which doesn't support the idea of Ukraine entering NATO.”

The statement added that future cooperation between Ukraine and Russia, including on economic issues, “will largely depend on the actions Ukraine takes in its foreign policy.”

By moving ahead towards a formal military alliance with Georgia, NATO effectively dismissed these Russian warnings. They are escalating pressure on Russia by signaling that each ethnic powder keg on Russia's borders can be turned into a pretext for war. Were Georgia to join NATO, Washington and the major European Union (EU) powers would be committed under Article 5 of the NATO treaty to go to war with Russia if fighting broke out again between Russia and Georgia.

NATO's offer of such guarantees to the regime in Kiev, where six ministries are controlled by violent anti-Russian Ukrainian fascists from the Svoboda Party or the Right Sector militia, would throw open the doors to countless provocations against Russia. Such provocations are all the more likely, in that the pro-Western Ukrainian regime is highly unstable, pledged to carry out deep and unpopular austerity measures against the Ukrainian working class.

Ukraine's unelected Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk has boasted that his government consists of "political suiciders," because its domestic policies will arouse such popular opposition.

The NATO moves directly raise the danger of world war, should Ukrainian or Georgian provocations trigger mutual escalation between Russia and the imperialist alliance. This underscores the devastating geo-strategic implications of the dissolution of the USSR, which has thrown the entire region open to reckless maneuvers by the Western imperialist powers and their fascistic local proxies in various ex-Soviet republics.

The 2008 Georgian war, as recounted by US diplomat Ronald Asmus in his book *A Little War That Shook the World*, gives a stark example of how a pro-Western regime can launch a military assault on Russia to deal with its own internal tensions. He recounts the Saakashvili regime's response to the Russian declaration of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia—itsself a response to the Western powers' declaration of the independence of Kosovo from Serbia.

Saakashvili, Asmus writes, acted on "his conviction that he would never survive politically if he stood by and did nothing. That still did not mean it was a wise choice. President Saakashvili began a war his allies had warned him not to start, a war they would not support, and a war that he could not win."

According to Asmus, Saakashvili modeled his plans on offensives like Operation Storm, the 1995 Croatian military offensive that carried out the ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Croatia.

Saakashvili, in fact, did enjoy the close support of Western governments and political operatives, however. "A large part of what was referred to as the 'mafia'—a loose collection of American and European think tanks, pro-democracy NGOs, journalists, and other veterans of the [NATO] enlargement debate of the 1990s—now found itself gathering at conferences and workshops in Tbilisi [the Georgian capital] and neighboring capitals, debating how the West should respond," Asmus notes.

This Western "mafia" was well aware of Saakashvili's plan for military aggression against Russian peacekeepers and regularly discussed them with Georgian officials. "Many of us referred to it as the 'land grab' scenario. Such conversations usually took place in private settings—at Saakashvili's home, in his chancellery late at night, or during one of Georgia's favorite pastimes: drinking. Maps were brought out or drawn on napkins as Georgian officials thought out loud about what-they-would-do-if scenarios," Asmus writes.

Ultimately, the drunken speculation of Saakashvili and his contacts in the Western "mafia" about how to best carry out ethnic cleansing and military aggression led to a poorly coordinated offensive and a predictable Georgian defeat at the hands of Russia. The NATO powers declined to get involved in a conflict with Russia that could rapidly escalate into nuclear war.

The moves to include the Kiev regime and Georgia in NATO are designed to change this situation, by presenting Russia with a situation where the NATO powers are diplomatically compelled to intervene on the side of their right-wing proxies.

They are creating a situation where the desperate regime of “political suiciders” in Kiev, acting on its own drunken plans worked out with the Western mafia, might similarly launch military provocations against Russia in an attempt to extricate itself from its internal crises, triggering a military escalation leading to global war.