

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

Aniwar.com

Black Sea Wars

By Patrick J. Buchanan

September 21, 2009

In August, the Georgian navy seized a Turkish tanker carrying fuel to Abkhazia, Georgia's former province whose declaration of independence a year ago is recognized by Russia but not the West.

The Turkish captain was sentenced to 24 years. When Ankara protested, he was released. Abkhazia has now threatened to sink any Georgian ship interfering in its "territorial waters," but it has no navy.

Russia, however, has a Black Sea Fleet and a treaty of friendship with Abkhazia, and has notified Tbilisi that the Russian coast guard will assure, peacefully, the sea commerce of Abkhazia.

Not backing down, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili – who launched and lost a war for South Ossetia in 48 hours in August 2008 – has declared the blockade of Abkhazia, which he claims as Georgian national territory, will remain in force. And he has just appointed as defense minister a 29-year-old ex-penitentiary boss with a questionable record on human rights who wants to tighten ties to NATO.

We have here the makings of a naval clash that Georgia, given Russian air, naval, and land forces in the eastern Black Sea, will lose.

What is Saakashvili up to? He seems intent on provoking a new crisis to force NATO to stand with him and bring the United States in on his side – against Russia. Ultimate goal: Return the issue of his lost provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia back onto the world's front burner.

While such a crisis may be in the interests of Saakashvili and his Russophobic U.S. neoconservative retainers, it is the furthest thing from U.S. national interests. President

Obama should have Joe Biden, Saakashvili's pal, phone him up and instruct him thus: "Mikheil, if you interfere with the sea commerce of Abkhazia, and provoke Russia into a Black Sea war, you fight it yourself. The Sixth Fleet is not going to steam into the Black Sea and pull your chestnuts out of the fire, old buddy. It will be your war, not ours."

Nor is the Abkhazian crisis the only one brewing in the Black Sea.

Last month, Russian naval troops blocked Ukrainian bailiffs from seizing navigational equipment from a lighthouse outside Sevastopol, the Crimean base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet for two centuries.

The Sevastopol lease, however, runs out in 2017. And Kiev has informed Moscow there will be no renewal. Russia's fleet will have to vacate Sevastopol and the Crimea, which belonged to Russia before Nikita Khrushchev ceded the entire peninsula to Ukraine in 1954 in a "brotherly gesture" while Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union.

Russia also bears a deep animus toward Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko, for trying to bring his country into NATO. Yushchenko, whose approval rating is in single digits, has been seen, ever since the U.S.-backed Orange Revolution of 2004 that brought him to power, as America's man in Kiev.

Moreover, as religious, cultural, ethnic, and historic ties between Kiev and Moscow go back centuries, Russians remain unreconciled to the loss of what they regard as the cradle of their country.

What is America's vital interest in all these quarrels? Zero.

The idea, mentioned in hawkish quarters, of having the Sixth Fleet take over the vacated naval base at Sevastopol would be as rash and provocative an act as having Chinese warships move into Guantanamo, were Havana to expel the United States.

But that is unlikely to happen. For Obama appears to be rolling back the George W. Bush policy of expanding NATO into former republics of the Soviet Union.

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are already members, and Bush and John McCain were anxious to bring in Ukraine and Georgia. But, as Bush's inaction during the Russia-Georgia war revealed, America is not going to fight Russia over who controls Abkhazia, North or South Ossetia, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, or Georgia. All are beyond any vital interest or legitimate sphere of influence of the United States.

With his cancellation of the U.S. missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic – a shield designed to defend against a nonexistent Iranian ICBM – Obama sent two messages to Moscow.

First, Obama believes entente with Russia is a surer guarantee of the peace and security of Eastern Europe than any U.S. weapons system. Second, Obama puts Washington-Moscow ties before any U.S. military ties to NATO allies in Eastern Europe.

Which means NATO is approaching an existential crisis.

Almost all NATO troops, except U.S., are gone from Iraq, and the alliance's minimal commitment to Afghanistan is ending with no victory in sight. NATO's expansion eastward has come to a halt. Ukraine and Georgia are not coming in. And the United States is not going to place troops, warships, or missiles any closer than they are now to Russia's frontiers.

"NATO must go out of area, or go out of business," said Sen. Richard Lugar at the Cold War's end. NATO went out of area, and is coming back with its tail between its legs. The alternative arises.