

Russia's Tough, But Measured Response to Escalated Provocations

The late-August news from inside Georgia should be enough to lay to rest the myth that the current crisis has something to do with “small, democratic Georgia” being oppressed by a belligerent Russia. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s first foreign minister, the former French diplomat Salome Zourabachvili, reveals that she was ousted for seeking diplomatic, rather than military solutions to Georgia’s conflicts with its autonomous regions; rumors flare that former Speaker of the Parliament Nino Burjanadze will challenge the erratic Saakashvili for the Presidency; and a respected independent opposition leader, Shalva Natelashvili of the Labor Party, launches an investigation into the Saakashvili clique’s possibly shipping out “billions of dollars to the Bahamas and Canary Islands” during the crisis.

It would be a clown show, if it weren’t a puppet show in the deadly British-authored strategic game of encircling Russia. Thus, an updated survey (for Aug. 15-22) of Russia’s resulting strategic posture, and the danger of further escalation throughout the region on Russia’s western and southern flanks, and beyond, is in order.

‘Dangerous Games’

Russian Foreign Ministry response to Secretary Rice: On Aug. 22, the Foreign Ministry chose the written response form, to reply to a question about U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s remark on Aug. 18, that Russian long-range strategic Air Force flights off U.S. coasts were “dangerous games,” which nobody has any need to be conducting. The Foreign Ministry noted that Russian long-range bomber flights were resumed, with public announcement and proper notification, last year. Perhaps the Pentagon has not briefed the State Department, it added, that the U.S. never halted its own strategic Air Force flights, and continues to base strategic bombers in “forward” position outside of the U.S.A., around the world.

The statement posed the question: If strategic bomber training flights are “dangerous games,” what then is “the appearance of U.S. strategic ballistic missile defense systems in immediate proximity to Russia’s borders”?

ABM Systems on Russia’s Borders

Poland agreed Aug. 15 to host elements of a U.S. global anti-missile system. Secretary of State Rice and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski signed the deal on Aug. 20 in Warsaw. The State Department announced that it would “allow the United States to construct, maintain, and operate a facility encompassing ten ground-based BMD interceptors. The United States and Poland will negotiate a separate agreement to address the status of U.S. military forces to be deployed to the territory of Poland.” Russia’s reaction was immediate, and included the following tough, but carefully formulated statements and actions.

Aug. 15: During his daily briefing on the South Ossetia crisis, Deputy Chief of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff Gen. Anatoli Nogovitsyn took a question on the emplacement of U.S. anti-missile batteries in Poland. Interfax quoted his reply: “The U.S.A. is engaged in an anti-missile defence for its own government, and not for Poland. And Poland, in deploying, opens itself to a military strike.”

Aug. 16: Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin compared the U.S. missile defense system to “a dead cat,” since its effectiveness can only be verified as a result of reciprocal thermonuclear missile strikes. Rogozin said that the signing of the agreement on an accelerated schedule effectively confirmed that Russia is the focus of the missile shield: “The Poles should be thanked for helping reveal the strategic goal of the U.S. missile defense plan,” he told RIA Novosti. Indeed, as *EIR* reported last year, a group of U.S. scientists has presented convincing analysis that Poland-



Polish Foreign Ministry

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radoslaw Sikorski (shown here on an earlier occasion) signed a deal in Warsaw on Aug. 20 to deploy U.S. missile interceptors on Polish territory. The Russian response was unequivocal: In so doing, Poland has opened itself to the possibility of a military strike.

based interceptors, combined with radars in the Czech Republic, could hit Russian nuclear-armed missiles in flight. While such a capability would not neutralize the entire Russian nuclear arsenal, it would contribute to starting a nuclear World War.

Aug. 20: President Dmitri Medvedev received Alexander Lukashenka, the President of Belarus, in Sochi. They will sign an agreement in the Fall of 2008 on creating a common air defense system, Kremlin aide Sergei Prikhodko announced. Belarus is located between Poland and Russia, being the major East European nation that has made no bid to join NATO.

Aug. 21: The Russian Foreign Ministry issued an official statement on the signing by Rice and Sikorski. It cited the entire “development of the military and political situation in Europe, whereby the American strategic capability is steadily advanced toward our borders.” The new radars in the Czech Republic “cover practically the entire European part of our country,” and the interceptor missiles in Poland “have no targets other than Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, nor will they have in the foreseeable future,” the statement said.

The Foreign Ministry statement linked the speeded-up Polish signing with the events in the Caucasus. “For a long time, we were assured that American anti-missile preparations were not directed against Russia. . . . We cannot fail to take into account the fact that, for years, while pumping weapons into Georgia, Washington assured us that these steps were not directed against Russia. Now, when the irrational actions of the Georgian leadership have killed and wounded thousands of people in South Ossetia and Russia, including Russian peacekeepers, it is becoming more and more obvious what such assurances are worth.”

At the same time, the Foreign Ministry kept open the possibility of returning to serious talks on missile defense, which had been the subject of a major initiative by then-President Vladimir Putin at the Bush family compound in Kennebunkport, Maine, last year. “Even in this difficult situation,” the statement said, “we do not intend to give up the dialogue, and are prepared to continue to work on this topic with all interested parties.”

The Georgia Theater

Several diplomatic moves and statements from Moscow explicitly represented a combined response to Georgia’s attack on South Ossetia, and the finalization of the East European anti-missile systems deployment. On Aug. 19, the NATO Council issued a denunciation of Russia for its military actions in response to the Georgian attack.

Aug. 20: Asking, “Are you ready to risk your prosperity and risk your lives and the lives of your children for the sake of Saakashvili?” Ambassador Rogozin called Saakashvili a “war criminal” for bombing civilians and Russian soldiers in South Ossetia. If NATO had already accepted Georgia as a full member, Rogozin pointed out, then the Western alliance and Russia would be officially at war right now.

A member of Rogozin’s mission told Novosti information agency that the ambassador has been recalled to Moscow “for consultations with the Russian leadership on the full spectrum of relations between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Alliance, including military cooperation.”

Aug. 21: Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov directed a tough message to U.S. elites, or at least that segment which reads the *Wall Street Journal*. In an article published under the headline “America Must Choose Between Georgia and Russia,” Lavrov wrote, “We’ll con-



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Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin (shown here speaking in Brussels in May 2008) described the U.S. missile defense system in Poland as “a dead cat.”

tinue to seek to deprive the present Georgian regime of the potential and resources to do more mischief. An embargo on arms supplies to the current Tbilisi regime would be a start.”

Lavrov voiced hope that U.S.-Russia relations not go out the window: “Russia is committed to the ongoing positive development of relations with the U.S.... Our bilateral relationship can only advance upon the basis of reciprocity.... I meant precisely that, when I said that the U.S. will have to choose between its virtual Georgia project and its much broader partnership with Russia.”

Aug. 21: Russia announced a freeze on military cooperation with NATO and allied countries. This includes all joint events planned for 2008, including maneuvers. Russian officials contacted the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow, after which the Norwegian ambassador announced that he expected to receive a written explanation of cancelled maneuvers involving Norway and Russia. Russia has suspended its participation in the NATO-led Open Spirit 2008 naval exercise in the Baltic Sea, exercises in which it has participated since 2003. A planned September visit by a U.S. naval frigate to the Far East port of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky was also cancelled.

Aug. 21: General Nogovitsyn addressed an international audience, through an interview in the Italian daily *La Repubblica*. He linked the Georgian attacks

and Poland’s missile defense deal with the U.S.A.: “Do you want to know why Washington is in a hurry to station its missiles in Poland? Because it did not expect that Russia could move so quickly to defend its allies in the Caucasus.... For months, the United States has tried to convince Moscow and international public opinion that it was a project aimed at protecting the West from possible Iranian attacks. Now, its real aim—as Condoleezza Rice herself was forced to admit—consists in protecting Europe against Russia.”

Warnings of Escalation

There were several warnings from Russian sources against a threatened re-escalation of attacks on Russian peacekeeping forces in and around South Ossetia, as well as indications of potential new provocations involving Azerbaijan or Russia’s largest neighbor, Ukraine.

Aug. 20, borders sealed: Russia temporarily sealed its borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan. Interfax reported that Aleksander Bortnikov, head of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), said that Russia has information that “Georgian special forces were planning terrorist acts” against strategic locations in Russia. They were mobilizing “bandit groups to undertake criminal acts in the North Caucasus,” he said, referring to the Russian autonomous republics across the border from Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Aug. 22, security zone established: Russian Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov announced completion of the withdrawal of extra Russian forces from South Ossetia, leaving only the peacekeeping contingent that was there before Georgia attacked it on Aug. 7-8. At the same time, Serdyukov said, Russian forces that have moved farther into Georgia are taking up posts in a security zone around the South Ossetian perimeter; this is covered by Principle 5 of the Aug. 12 Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement, under which Russian peacekeepers may take “additional security measures” until there is a political settlement of the entire matter.

Aug. 22, “situation far from stable”: General Nogovitsyn said at his press briefing that the situation in the conflict zone was “far from stable.” In particular, he charged that Georgian forces were regrouping and restoring their fighting potential, in central Georgia. General Nogovitsyn stated the Russian military’s evaluation, that “there are deliberate preparations under way for further actions in the region.”

Aug. 22, provocation in Azerbaijan? Former

State Department official Richard Holbrooke, exhibiting the crisis-manipulation mindset he is famous for (like his associate, H.G. Wells Society initiate Madeleine Albright), visiting Tbilisi, penned a *Washington Post* op-ed, calling for “massive economic and military assistance” to keep Saakashvili in power. He asserts that Ukraine and Azerbaijan are the likely “next targets” for Russian intimidation and/or the use of force.

The sudden reference to Azerbaijan is ominous, in view of remarks by another shadowy ex-State Department figure, Paul Goble, the previous day. Commenting over Voice of America on the bombing of a mosque in Baku, Azerbaijan, which had just happened, Goble was ready with an elaborate scenario: “This event seems to be extraordinarily dangerous. Regardless of who is behind those terrorists, the Abu Bekr mosque bombing is easy to interpret as a Russian or Armenian provocation, for the purpose of causing a conflict between Azerbaijan and Iran, then finding a pretext for Russian intervention in Azerbaijan.” Goble, a longtime specialist in manipulating Central Asia and Caucasus conflicts against Moscow, painted a picture of such an incident spinning out into a larger conflict, with the U.S.A. and Azerbaijan on one side, and Iran on the other.

Goble claimed that Russian diplomats in Baku have threatened Azerbaijan that it had better “draw the consequences” of the Georgia events. But, on Aug. 22, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced a telephone consultation between Lavrov and the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, which had featured “constructive discussion about recent proposals for institutionalized multilateral interaction in the Transcaucasus.” That would include the Caucasus-region initiative of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He had been in Baku, after a visit to Moscow, shortly before the bombing, while Turkey itself has been the scene of a new round of bombings.

Aug. 21: Natalia Vitrenko, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU), gave a press conference upon returning from a fact-finding visit to Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, where she accompanied a group of PSPU volunteers for relief efforts. Vitrenko is



Estonian Navy

An operation in the NATO-led Open Spirit naval exercises in the Baltic Sea in 2006. Russia has participated every year since 2003, but withdrew from this year's maneuvers, while freezing military cooperation with NATO and allied countries.

currently best known for high-profile demonstrations against Ukraine's joining NATO, and attempts to stop NATO exercises in the Black Sea. According to a PSPU press release, she voiced concern about pro-NATO forces in the Ukrainian government staging a “Reichstag Fire” incident around the Russian Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, Crimea, Ukraine “in order to then blame Russia for aggression and hurl the forces of the NATO countries against Russia.”

General Nogovitsyn said at his press briefing that the Russian Armed Forces will react appropriately, in the event of possible terrorist attacks on Russia's Black Sea Fleet. This includes serious provocations that would interfere with the Fleet's function.

Russian warnings also include potential incidents that might spring from the disproportionate show of NATO military vessels for an alleged “routine exercise” just off the Russian Black Sea coastline, the scope of which has been expanded without explanation. In addition to the original multi-national exercise force, NATO on Aug. 22 sent a Polish frigate and a U.S. destroyer through the Bosphorus. The Russian Navy announced that it would continue to carry out its maritime traffic security patrols off the coast of Abkhazia, Georgia, voiced doubt that NATO vessels need to be in the Black Sea, and promised to respond swiftly to any provocations against its Black Sea Fleet.