

America's Post-Cold War Policies in the Post-Soviet Expanse

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THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN DIALOGUE on regional issues differs greatly from the Soviet-American dialogue of the Cold War era maintained to prevent regional conflicts and their escalation among Moscow's and Washington's ideological allies to avoid a direct armed clash between the Great Powers fraught with a nuclear catastrophe.

With several regional conflicts among Soviet and American allies (in Central America, Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, etc.) de-escalated and settled and Russia's pull-out from Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 1990s, a direct military encounter between Russia and America became impossible. In fact, the relations between the two countries in the post-bipolar world are unfolding in a different context: the regional disagreements ceased to be an ideological contest between "communism" and "capitalism" to assume a more traditional form of struggle for the spheres of influence.

Indeed, Moscow was overtly irritated by America's efforts to move into the regions which the Russian elite regarded as the traditional zone of Russia's vital interests (the post-Soviet expanse in the first place). Washington, in turn, interpreted Russia's latest tendency to expand its presence in the near abroad in "the empire strikes back" terms.

Today, the American establishment has been looking at the conflict with Russia over influence in the post-Soviet expanse as a "zero-sum game" between Western "democracy" and "Russian neo-imperialism." Janusz Bugaiski, Director of the New European Democracies Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, believes: "By naively assuming that Western and Russian national interests are equivalent or compatible, Washington and Brussels play into the hands of

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an imperial power that has revived its ambitions... Russia possesses global aspirations that do not coincide with those of a democratic world order. The Kremlin is seeking to restore a Russian dominated post-Soviet region where security, foreign policy, energy supplies, and trade are determined by Moscow. Mr. Putin thereby aims to create a counterbalance to America's presence throughout Eurasia that will also neutralize EU influences. If mishandled, U.S. and EU collaboration with Moscow may actually speed up Mr. Putin's timetable. It may undermine the West's political and military objectives in Central Asia and the Caucasus where weak states confront the double menace of Islamic radicalism and Russian imperialism... Both the U.S. and EU can work in tandem to guarantee the integrity and security of all states threatened by Moscow's designs, from Moldova and Ukraine to Georgia and Uzbekistan. They must be brought into a closer Western orbit while their long-term stability can be promoted through political pluralism, a free media, civil society, and the rule of law – practices that are in perilously short supply.”

Détente was killed by the Soviet-American rivalry all over the world; the disagreements between the Russian Federation and the United States on regional issues soured their post-1991 bilateral relations.

A “Sanitary Cordon” Full of Holes

EARLY IN THE 21ST CENTURY, Washington imagined that it finally found a perfect geopolitical weapon – the so-called color revolutions – to squeeze Russia from its zone of influence in the post-Soviet expanse. Recently, it looked as if Moscow had no choice but to count its geopolitical losses in the face of the inexorably tightening “sanitary cordon” around Russia as part of the global democratization project realized by the West under American leadership.

Starting with 2003, regime change (funded and organized by American governmental and non-governmental structures: NDI, IRI, Department of State, USAID, Freedom House, and George Soros' Open Society Institute) in some of the newly independent states brought to power even more anti-Russian and even more pro-American leaders.

Thus installed, the new leaders sat down to business of making

“front-line states” out of their countries to mobilize the sociums under anti-Russian slogans and to prove Washington and Brussels that they could contain “Russian expansionism.” On December 2, 2005, the Community of Democratic Choice – Community of Democracies of the Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian Region was set up in Kiev to unite Ukraine, Georgia, Moldavia, Rumania, Macedonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. On May 4, 2006, in Vilnius U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney told the Community’s second summit that Russia should either join the “system” or become an enemy.¹ This made it clear that “cordon sanitaire” of the past was reincarnated in the form of the Community of Democratic Choice.

Today, the wave of color revolutions raised by the United States has subsided. In 2005, an attempt at a regime change failed in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan; in 2006 and 2010, in Byelorussia; in February 2010, Viktor Yanukovich replaced the “orange president” Viktor Yushchenko as president of Ukraine; in April 2010, the Bakiev clan was deposed in Kirgizia. Russia could finally revenge its geopolitical defeats of the 1990s and 2000s. In his article “Fade to Grey” which appeared on July 7, 2010 in *Diplomatic Courier*, Brian J. Forest, editor-in-chief of this journal, wrote that the bright days of the democratic color revolutions had become things of the past. Undaunted by the Western pressure at its “backyard” Russia had not merely checked the Western offensive but launched a counteroffensive with several stratagems to restore its lost influence.²

Recently, America has shed part of its “color revolutions” zeal and has begun doubting that they were the best instrument of undermining Russia’s influence in Eurasia. “The Right Direction for U.S. Policy toward Russia” report issued in March 2009 by influential research centers, the Nixon Center and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University, says in part: “The United States must resist these efforts and any efforts by Russia to establish a sphere of influence in Europe or elsewhere in Eurasia, including attempts to deny other countries their right of association with NATO or other organizations. At the same time, however, Washington should not expect that it can attempt to create its own sphere of influence on Russia’s borders while simultaneously seeking a constructive relationship with Russia.

“We do not believe that the United States has a compelling security interest in expediting NATO membership for either Ukraine or Georgia at this time. While both are strategically located, their membership in the alliance could decrease rather than increase Europe’s overall security ...

at a time when the United States and NATO face many critical challenges elsewhere.”³

This was not a random shift; the Caucasian events of August 2008 demonstrated that America and NATO had been wrong to cold-shoulder Russia after the Cold War: not only the Georgian army was routed in several days (it was believed, with some reason, to be the region's strongest army the equipment and training of which cost Americans millions of dollars).⁴ An American ally was defeated while Washington proved unable to support it in any way. “Several senior White House staffers” urged “at least some consideration of limited military options,” such as bombing the mountain tunnel that served as Russia's main supply line.⁵

American Force Posture in the Post-Soviet Expanse

MEANWHILE, the fact that America is building up its force posture in the post-Soviet expanse causes well-justified concerns in Moscow. In an interview published in the *Izvestia* newspaper, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the RF Security Council, described the U.S. and NATO policy of increasing their military presence in Eastern Europe as seeking strategic military superiority over Russia. “Georgia and particularly Ukraine could, if they joined the alliance, become a suitable foothold for large ground, air and naval units equipped with high-precision and tactical nuclear weapons,” Patrushev said.

From those positions, he went on to say, strikes could be aimed at targets in “the European part of Russia, including elements of government and military control.” This means that if stationed in Ukraine these weapons will acquire strategic importance.⁶

These concerns are well justified. The EUCOM Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Program is a security assistance program designed to create an increased capability in the Georgian military to support Operation Iraqi Freedom stability missions. The American military expect that this program will serve a pattern for other similar programs designed to achieve peace and stability and oppose terrorism.

Funding was fairly limited: in 2006-2007, it was about \$20 million: Americans delivered twelve Bell-212 and nine UH-1H America-made helicopters, 4WD Humvee vehicles and M-4 carbines.

Since 2002, the Pentagon has spent in Georgia \$200 million on military training; it is said that this is done to prepare the Georgian military for counterterrorist operation, not for a war against Russia.

Lt. Col. Robert Hamilton, who ran the U.S. military training program in Georgia, insists: “At no time did the U.S. attempt to train or equip the Georgian armed forces for a conflict with Russia. In fact, the U.S. deliberately avoided training capabilities that were seen as ‘too provocative’ to Russia. So the United States never trained the Georgians how to use tanks, artillery or attack helicopters – precisely because those are the skills of all-out conventional warfare.”⁷

This is true: the United States entrusted the “dirty business” of training Georgians “how to use tanks, artillery or attack helicopters” to its satellites, “orange” Ukraine being one of them, in the post-Soviet expanse. In 2005-2008, Kiev extended military technical support to Tbilisi on a great scale. This makes Ukraine a side in the armed conflict of August 2008 in the Southern Caucasus. Ukraine sold Georgia various types of offensive weapons, such as 14 aircraft, three ships, about 150 infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers, fifteen S-300 medium-range systems, 150-200 man-portable air defense systems, 34 self-propelled guns, over 40 thousand units of small arms. Not infrequently military machines and equipment were sold for symbolic prices: in 2007, 15 tanks T-72A were sold for \$155,348 apiece. President Yushchenko went even further: some weapons exports were conducted in a manner detrimental to Ukraine’s defense: a number of Buk missile system units sold to Georgia were taken off active duty, thus diminishing Ukraine’s air defense capabilities.⁸

It is hard to imagine that Washington knew nothing about this large-scale military aid; in fact, it is prepared to go on with its military cooperation with Tbilisi after the dramatic events of August 2008. On May 24, 2009, Philip Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, said in Yerevan: “The United States will continue to provide necessary assistance to Georgia in the military sphere, but that does not mean selling arms. Georgian military assistance will be directed to both civil and military cooperation in the doctrinal areas and it will not include the sale of weapons or assist in a military solution.”⁹

Very much as usual, Georgia will receive military aid along the EUCOM line. The EUCOM has been entrusted with assessing the results; an analysis supplied by the EUCOM officers late in 2008 disappointed Tbilisi: it said that Georgia was not yet fit for NATO membership.

According to the assessment’s report, some of the problems should have been unsurprising. Georgia’s armed forces, the assessment found, lacked “the doctrine, institutional training and the experience needed to

effectively command and control organizations throughout the chain of command. Georgia had a poor grasp of military intelligence, and did not collect or share its intelligence in an organized fashion. This, in the officer's view, contributed to failures in August." ¹⁰

The American leaders are doing a lot to support their Caucasian ally. In July 2009, Philip Crowley, spokesman for the State Department, said: "Georgia is on a path that the United States supports toward NATO membership. Clearly, you know, a fundamental tenet of NATO membership is to have a military that meets NATO standards and would add to the capability of the alliance." He also pointed out that America was determined to help Georgia with its defensive requirements and that Washington had refused to recognize any Russian sphere of influence. ¹¹

The Caspian Guard Initiative is another vehicle the EUCOM uses to penetrate the Caucasus and Central Asia within which the United States extend assistance to the armed forces of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, including training (to improve their ability to respond to narcoterrorism); deliveries of American means of signals intelligence, modernization of ships and communication means. This cooperation is expected to improve maritime training of the military of the two Caspian countries as well as to increase their rapid reaction capability and improving border management.

There is an opinion that in future Americans will rely on the program to deploy their mobile forces in the region to keep the air corridor between the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq open. ¹²

In the Baltic countries, Americans use the airbases in Lievārde (Latvia), Pajuostis and Zokniai (Lithuania), and Amari (Estonia). Some of them have been already upgraded according to the NATO standards with their landing strips adjusted to accept heavy military transport aircraft. Today, the Zokniai airbase at Šiauliai is used by rotational air forces of the NATO members engaged in the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission. ¹³

The United States is especially interested in several naval objects on the Baltic: the port of Muuga (Estonia), the ports and naval bases in Klaipeda (Lithuania) and in Liepāja (Latvia). The former two have been already adjusted: the mooring fronts were extended and the storage facilities enlarged to accommodate NATO naval forces on a temporal basis.

The testing ground in Pabrade (Lithuania) and the Adaži training center of ground forces (Latvia) are actively used by the armed forces of the United States, NATO and the Baltic countries for joint operational-military training; their equipment will be upgraded. The Adaži center will be

extended and equipped with simulators of various kind; its infrastructure will be updated.

The Baltnet Air Surveillance Program received a regional center in Karmelava (Lithuania) and the national air surveillance systems and air traffic control at Ameri (Estonia) and Riga (Latvia). It has already been decided how many radar stations are needed and how they should be stationed across the Baltic states. According to Western experts, the system should consist of eight radar posts equipped with latest America-made 3-dimensional air search radars. Two of them – in Kellavere (Estonia) and Audrini (Latvia) – have been put on combat duty. They are equipped with 3-dimensional air search radar system AN/TPS-117 produced in the U.S. which can detect and track up to 800 air targets within the maximal range of 370 km.¹⁴

New American Military Politics in Eurasia

DESPITE EUROPE'S OBVIOUS IMPORTANCE for the U.S. military politics, in the post-Cold War years Washington has been steadily reducing the numerical strength of its Europe-deployed armed forces from 300 thousand at the turn of the 1990s to the present less than 80 thousand. Further reductions are planned as part of EUCOM transformation: by 2015, the Pentagon plans to cut down its troops in Europe to 50 thousand.

Before the EUCOM reorganization, the American grouping in Europe included 1st infantry division, 1st armored division, 12th airborne brigade; 18th MP brigade, 22nd signals brigade, 69th air defense artillery brigade, 130th engineer brigade, 205th military intelligence brigade, and corps artillery. Today the EUCOM has two stationed American brigades – the Stryker Brigade Combat Team in Vilseck, FRG and the 17th airborne brigade in Vicenza, Italy.

The far from simple situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere justifies the maximal use of the EUCOM fighting capabilities (human and material) yet one cannot but wonder: will the EUCOM cope with the increasingly complicated problems with the couple of brigades at its disposal?

On March 24, 2009, speaking to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee General Bantz I. Craddock, the then USA Commander of EUCOM, did not conceal his concern with Moscow's obvious intention to use its economic and military instruments to secure its foreign policy aims. He deemed it necessary to point out: "For ground forces, it includes

two permanently stationed infantry brigade combat teams – a Stryker Brigade Combat Team in Germany and an Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) in Italy – along with two heavy Brigade Combat Teams in Germany. Although these two brigades are scheduled to return to CONUS in 2012 and 2013, I have recommended and continue to recommend that we retain them in EUCOM.”¹⁵

He warning was taken into account: according to the Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010, “the United States will retain four brigade combat teams and an Army Corps headquarters forward-stationed on the continent.”¹⁶

The armed conflict in Georgia sowed doubts about America’s political guarantees among the U.S. allies: today, America’s military presence on the ally’s territory alone is counted as reliable. This explains why in August 2008 Poland hastened to sign an agreement with the United States under which it would get elements of the U.S. third missile defense region on its territory as well as Patriot missiles.

Under the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership signed by the foreign ministers of the two countries in January 2009, America guaranteed Georgia’s security. It said, in particular: “The United States continues to support Georgia’s efforts in defense reform and improved defense capabilities... The United States supports Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO.”¹⁷ Washington, however, avoided any specific military-political obligations.

To calm down its East European NATO allies, the American military-political leadership decided to supply its political promises with promises of military support. It looks as if the talk about rebuffing Russia’s “aggression” against the Baltic countries belongs to the same category.

In the last two years, however, Washington and Brussels lost much of their former sentiments in favor of a military confrontation with Russia. This is explained not only by the new president in the White House and the newly appointed NATO Secretary General: the United States and its allies are confronted with numerous challenges and problems across the vast Eurasian continent – ranging from the Middle East peace process to the North Korean nuclear file – which cannot be addressed without Russia’s support .

“We seek to build a stable, substantive, multidimensional relationship with Russia, based on mutual interests. The United States has an interest in a strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia that respects international norms. As the two nations possessing the majority of the world’s nuclear

weapons, we are working together to advance nonproliferation, both by reducing our nuclear arsenals and by cooperating to ensure that other countries meet their international commitments to reducing the spread of nuclear weapons around the world. We will seek greater partnership with Russia in confronting violent extremism, especially in Afghanistan,” says the National Security Strategy.¹⁸

The EUCOM commanders, likewise, have changed their approaches to Russia. As distinct from General Craddock, former EUCOM commander, his successor Admiral James Stavridis spares no words to point that cooperation with Russia in the military sphere (missile defense, Afghanistan, counter-proliferation, counterterrorism, and counter-narcotics, among other efforts) is signally important.¹⁹

At the same time, the new U.S. Administration has not abandoned its active policy in Eurasia and the post-Soviet expanse: “In working the bilateral military-to-military relationship with Russia, however, European Command will work with NATO and other partners to implement an integrated and inclusive security cooperation architecture beneficial to all participants that does not come at the expense of our allies and partners.”²⁰

An absence of ideological confrontation between America and Russia does not rule out their military-political rivalry in Eurasia. America’s military politics in Europe was merely adjusted to the new administration’s political approaches. The *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010* says: “The United States and Russia share many interests – including countering proliferation and confronting terrorism. We are working with Moscow to develop a new START Treaty – an important step in the President’s initiative toward a world free of nuclear weapons. The new START Treaty will further reduce both nations’ nuclear arsenals while maintaining important treaty-monitoring provisions. We will seek out opportunities to work with Moscow on emerging issues, such as the future of the Arctic and the need for effective missile defense architectures designed to protect the region from external threats. At the same time, the United States will continue to engage with Russia’s neighbors as fully independent and sovereign states.”²¹

Washington repeatedly assured the newly independent states of its support of their sovereignty and independence even though Washington and Moscow cannot agree on what is sovereignty and what can be described as its violation. American officials interpret sovereignty of the Soviet successor-states as their moving away from Russia and drawing

closer to the United States and the West. On September 18, 2008, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaking at the German Marshall Fund said: "We have opened NATO to any sovereign, democratic state in Europe that can meet its standards of membership. We've supported the right of countries emerging from communism to choose what path of development they pursue and what institutions they wish to join.

"And this historic effort has succeeded beyond imagination. Twelve of our 28 neighbor NATO allies are former captive nations." ²² In July 2010, Hillary Rodham Clinton who succeeded Rice as the U.S. Secretary of State, pointed out during her tour of Eastern Europe that "We should continue to open NATO's door to European countries such as Georgia and Ukraine and help them meet NATO standards." ²³

Moscow can hardly accept this interpretation of "independence and sovereignty" of the former communist countries and the newly independent states.

"Finlandization" Is not a Pejorative Term

DÉTENTE WAS KILLED by the Soviet-American rivalry all over the world; the disagreements between the Russian Federation and the United States on regional issues soured their post-1991 bilateral relations.

The "reset" policy in Russian-American relations launched by the Obama Administration might likewise be undermined if the two countries continue to disagree over the habitual "sore points": the post-Soviet expanse, the Balkans and the Middle East (Russia's revived activity in the Western Hemisphere might add Cuba to the list).

In the past, the great powers settled their regional disagreements by:

- (1) delimitating the spheres of influence;
- (2) setting up buffer zones;
- (3) remaining within certain limits during regional conflicts.

The first two methods were actively applied during the European Concert era and up to World War I. In the 21st century, this traditional imperialist foreign policy is hardly applicable. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union remained devoted to what Graham Allison aptly called "primitive rules of prudence" (nuclear-risk reduction, avoidance of direct clashes between Soviet and American armed forces, etc.); it helped avoid a world thermonuclear war but never prevented escalation of tension between the great powers under pressure of the Angolan, Nicaraguan, Ethiopian, Afghan, and other factors.

It seems that only a serious and meaningful dialogue on the regional aspects of Russian-American relations and on their behavior on the international scene in the 21st century can prevent further confrontation.

First, the sides could institutionalize the dialogue on regional issues of mutual interest by setting up bilateral workgroups (at the middle executive level of their foreign and defense ministries).

Second, the sides could codify the “primitive rules of prudence”: the August 2008 developments in the Caucasus demonstrated that a direct military clash caused by escalated local conflicts cannot be ruled out. If codified in the form of an international legal act the “primitive rules of prudence” would add predictability to the Russian-American relations.

Third, these rules should be supplemented with the Finlandization principle. In the past, Finlandization meant a deal of sorts between Russia, the United States and the small states involved in a local conflict: the great powers refrained from interfering in international affairs of the small country and prevented it from turning into a national security threat to the other great power.

Throughout the Cold War, the term was perceived as pejorative yet the last 66 years of the Soviet-Finnish and Russian-Finnish relations have demonstrated that Finlandization is the best form of interaction between a great power and its small neighbor. Moscow dropped its plans of “Sovietization” of Finland, while Finland remained neutral during the Cold War. The Caribbean crisis of 1962 was settled according to the “Finnish” pattern: the Soviet Union removed its missiles in exchange for the United States’ promise not to invade the Island of Freedom.

It seems that Finlandization of the post-Soviet expanse will be conducive to a settlement of the Russian-American regional disagreements: NATO should check its eastward expansion in exchange for Moscow’s promise to respect independence and sovereignty of the near abroad. This can be successfully applied to other regional conflicts which cause concerns in both capitals.

NOTES

¹ <http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/May/04-398238.html>

² See: Forest B., “Fade to Grey,” *Diplomatic Courier*, 2010. July 5 // <http://www.diplomaticcourier.org/kmitan/articleback.php?newsid=547>

³ *The Right Direction for U.S. Policy toward Russia. A Report from the Commission on U.S. Policy toward Russia.* March 2009. Washington, D.C. // <http://www.nixoncenter.org/RussiaReport09.pdf>

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- ⁶ *Izvestia*, October 2, 2008.
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- ⁸ *Izvestia*, October 2-3, 2008
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- ¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/18/world/europe/18iht-18georgia.18775418.html?page-wanted=2>
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- ¹⁴ Zheglov Yu., "Rekonfiguratsia voennogo prisutstviya SShA za rubezhom," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, 2007, No. 1 // <http://pentagonus.ru/Army/stat/Strukt/S18.htm>
- ¹⁵ Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, pp. 224-225.
- ¹⁶ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, p. 66.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/113762.htm>
- ¹⁸ National Security Strategy. 2010, P. 44.
- ¹⁹ <http://arabnews.com/world/article102500.ece>
- ²⁰ House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Testimony of Admiral James G. Stavridis, United States Navy Commander, United States European Command before the 112th Congress, 2011.
- ²¹ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, pp. 58-59.
- ²² Speech of Condoleezza Rice at German Marshall Fund on U.S.-Russia Relations. September 18. 2008 // <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080918155132eafas0.4152033.html?CP.rss=true>
- ²³ <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/hillary-clinton-natos-open-door-policy-for-georgia-ukraine-187293-eng.html>

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