

Georgia on My Mind

Like all things, the conflict in Georgia is complex. Complex enough that it is easy to get lost in the details and miss the main issue. In the immediate situation two things are clear, one being that a number of people have been killed, and the other being that it was Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili who started the military action, not the Russians. The primary responsibility for the loss of life rests with him and his European and US backers.

Beyond that, however, I want to step way back, and look at events nearly a half century in the past to put Georgia in perspective.

In 1962, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a young conservative friend said to me "Look what your friend Castro has done - he has let the Soviets put nuclear missiles on his island". I told my young friend (I was young then too) that he could take my word for it, that the Soviets had not put missiles there. I said I'd bet him and give him odds, saying this was my field of expertise and I knew that the Soviets knew if they put nuclear missiles in Cuba it would provoke war with the US. I said that if I knew this, surely the Soviets knew it, so he (my young friend) should not be so naive as to think the Soviets had put missiles there.

When Kennedy went to the UN and showed the aerial photographs I didn't believe him - I assumed it was a ploy to excuse another US invasion. It was not until the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations rose to announce that the missiles were being withdrawn that I realized logic doesn't govern great powers. *(There was an element of logic in Khrushchev's gamble - in exchange for withdrawing the missiles, he got a pledge that Cuba would not be attacked, and the US missiles in Turkey and Italy would be withdrawn - but all that we have learned since confirms that it was a gamble that took us almost over the edge of nuclear war).*

I keep forgetting this. It took me the better part of the ten years of the Vietnam War to understand, finally, that there was no reason the US had gone into Vietnam except a series of bad guesses, foolish gambles, and an inexcusable lack of basic information.

Even as late as the invasion of Iraq I could not believe that attack would take place, because it was so utterly stupid, so clearly doomed to disaster. I was sure that, at the last moment, some well informed Wall Street cabal would pick up the phone to the White House and tell Bush "No". I mean, if I could grasp that it was a mistake, surely the powers that run the country would also know it.

All of which brings us back to Georgia and the madness of US intentions of bringing it into NATO - and, in fact, the need to get rid of NATO itself. The Cold War was marked by military initiatives of the West, then matched by the Soviet Union. NATO was formed in May, 1949. The Warsaw Pact was not established until 1955. However critical one might have been of the Soviet Union (and I was generally among the sharply critical), NATO came first, the Warsaw Pact was formed as a defensive move.

In the history of Europe both pacts proved to be designed primarily for "vertical control" - NATO was really intended to protect Western Europe from any move by any country to go

Communist (there is pretty solid history on this). The Warsaw Pact was used in two cases - the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and the Prague Spring of 1968 - not to defend Communist states from Western intervention, but to suppress internal revolt. (In the case of Czechoslovakia this was particularly outrageous, since the government the Warsaw Pact overturned *was a Communist government!*).

I remember some of us in the peace movement felt, in October of 1956, as Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest, that the most effective support the West could give the Hungarians would have been to make a public statement that there should be an immediate summit of US and Soviet leaders with the goal of dissolving both the Warsaw and NATO pacts, with the understanding that the neutrality of Hungary would follow the pattern of Austria and Finland. If one thinks of Russian history, one must understand that the desire for neutral border states was crucial - Russia had been invaded by Napoleon, by the Kaiser's armies in World War I, and then, with the loss of 27 million Soviet citizens, by Hitler's armies in World War II.

But the West, rather than reach out to establish a stable situation in Europe, hoped to profit from Soviet unrest. The grand moment when the NATO alliance should logically have been dissolved was with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Instead, the United States has pushed steadily East, bringing former parts of the Soviet's Eastern Bloc into NATO.

In the case of Yugoslavia, there is blood enough to go around, but the Western media has been consistently anti-Serbian, overlooking the rush by Germany to recognize Croatia, when it sought to break from Yugoslavia. Given the terrible history of German domination of Yugoslavia during WW II, and the mass murders of which the Croatian fascists were guilty, this move to speed the breakup of Yugoslavia was unwise. And here I blame the European much more than the US - for the Europeans, of all people, should have been wary of unleashing the demons of the Baltic. But they did. And in the end we had mass murder in Bosnia, we had the bombing of civilians in Serbia by NATO aircraft. And we finally saw Kosovo forcibly detached from Serbia. And at that time Putin had warned against this support of separatist movements.

The US had pushed for missile defense systems to be installed virtually on the borders of Russia. Putin had made it very clear that at some point a price would be paid. That price is now being paid in Georgia, which in an almost insane act of hubris, the US sought to bring into NATO.

It is time for the Europeans to take matters into their own hands and reject the very concept of NATO. NATO which, created as a shield against the Soviets, became an engine of war in the Balkans, which has given support to the invasion of Iraq, and which has troops in Afghanistan. How in the name of God did NATO's mission ever extend to Asia?

Russia's actions, violent as they have been (and again, I note, the violence was in response to that of Georgian leaders), reflect a deep unease in many parts of the world that the US, already in a state of economic collapse, is exporting military interventions far from its borders. There have been no Russian actions since the fall of the USSR (and, leaving aside the invasion of Afghanistan, none during the time of the USSR) that begin to match the US actions in Iraq, in

Vietnam, in Cambodia, in Laos, in its support for its client state, Israel, which had established apartheid in Palestine and in Afghanistan, where we are currently repeating the unhappy experience of the Soviets, and of the British before them.

Georgia on my mind indeed - it leads me to conclude that the peace movement must put the dissolution of NATO very high on its agenda, and that there is no point in Europeans evading the responsibility - they have been a willing party to this series of blunders.

Let Georgia follow the pattern of Finland, and co-exist with Russia as a neutral neighbor. And let the US end its effort to dominate the world by its endless expansion of military bases. The one thing which might make the heartache of Georgia worth it would be if it put paid to the folly of NATO.

David McReynolds, 8/13/08