
Marching Through Georgia III : Reality's Rout And Cheney's Viagra

By Chris Floyd
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Russkies on the march! Aggression! Kremlin! The crisis in Georgia is like a big dose of Viagra for these guys, taking them back to their hot youth and all the Cold War hubba-hubba. As noted here the other day, I don't think the current crisis in Georgia will spiral into any kind of military confrontation between Russia and the United States. The U.S. government has a long history of egging on other people to slap at Washington's enemies -- then abandoning them when the inevitable slapback occurs. George Bush I's incitement of a Shiite uprising in Iraq in 1991 and his subsequent collusion with Saddam in crushing the rebellion is a prime example. As I said earlier, the American elite's armchair militarists -- like Dick "Other Priorities" Cheney, and George W. "I Quit" Bush -- prefer to slaughter defenseless people in broken-down states, not take on nations with powerful modern militaries.

Then again, there is a long, strong lunatic strain running through the American militarist establishment, a cultish faction that has always longed to unleash "the Big One" on the Russkies or the gooks or the Ay-rabs or somebody out there. The Cheney faction in particular is riddled with adherents of this cult, who, like their leader, measure their manhood by the throw-weight of America's nuclear missiles. Thus every flashpoint on the international scene -- which inevitably involves "American interests," because the American Empire has extended its military and monetary reach into every nook and cranny of the world -- carries with it a disproportionate danger of escalation into annihilation. In almost every case, this threat is extremely low; but it is always there, like background radiation, or perhaps a dormant fever, and must be considered. Especially considering the moral idiots in charge of the "great" powers of our day.

But although there is little chance of extreme escalation in the Russia-Georgia conflict, the crisis has sufficient dangers in itself -- not least the increasing divergence from reality in the American response. Excellent analyses of this and other aspects of the situation continue to appear.

First up, The Nation provides an informative perspective on Russia-Georgia from Mark Ames -- Getting Georgia's War On:

The outbreak of war in Georgia on Friday offers a disturbing and somewhat surreal taste of what to expect from John McCain should he become our nation's Commander in Chief. As the centuries-old ethnic animosities between Georgia and Ossetia boiled over into another armed conflict, drawing in neighboring Russia, McCain issued a stark-raving statement from Des Moines that is disturbingly reminiscent of the language used in the lead-up to NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999, a war McCain zealously pushed for:

"We should immediately call a meeting of the North Atlantic Council to assess Georgia's security and review measures NATO can take to contribute to stabilizing this very dangerous situation," McCain said.

Calling on NATO to "stabilize this dangerous situation" is not going down well with Russia, where images of dead Russian peacekeepers and of frightened Ossetian refugees streaming across its borders have put the country in a very vengeful mood. It's hard to imagine what measures NATO could take under a McCain presidency, but in the mind of a man who thinks US troops should stay in Iraq for 100 years, and who runs around singing "Bomb Bomb Iran!" it's not

hard to guess--and even harder not to be horrified by what it may mean come January 2009, should he win....

The problem with McCain's bold demand about going to the UN is that Russia already tried doing exactly what McCain called for--and got rejected by McCain's neocon pals in the Bush Administration. Early this morning, Russia convened an emergency session of the UN Security Council, calling on both sides to immediately cease hostilities, return to the negotiating table and renounce the use of force--but the last part about renouncing the use of force is exactly what Georgia's president Mikhail Saakashvili refuses to do.

The Bush Administration showed that it too has no patience with crunchy "renounce the use of force" resolutions. According to a Reuters report from earlier in the day:

At the request of Russia, the U.N. Security Council held an emergency session in New York but failed to reach consensus early Friday on a Russian-drafted statement.

The council concluded it was at a stalemate after the United States, Britain and some other members backed the Georgians in rejecting a phrase in the three-sentence draft statement that would have required both sides "to renounce the use of force," council diplomats said.

The meaning of this is clear: the United States and Britain are backing Saakashvili's invasion. Why would we back Saakashvili's reckless war, when last year even Bush was denouncing the Pinochet-wannabe's violent attack on his own people during a peaceful opposition protest in Georgia's capital, as well as shutting down the opposition media and exiling of political opponents? That would be a brain-teaser if the last seven years hadn't answered this question so many painful times already.

But with McCain, answering this is a little trickier. When he issued today's Des Moines statement calling for Russia to do what Russia already did a few hours earlier, you have to ask yourself: either McCain's short-term memory is totally shot, encased in an impenetrable tomb of aluminum-zirconium plaque... or worse, McCain simply doesn't give a damn about reality, he just wants to get Georgia's war on, as badly as Saakashvili does.

The awful truth is probably a combination of the two, which is the worst of all worlds, considering McCain's raving Russophobia, and his campaign team's financial and ideological ties to Saakashvili....

In 2006, McCain visited Georgia and denounced the South Ossetian separatists, proving that Scheunemann wasn't wasting his Georgian sponsor's money. At a speech he gave in a Georgian army base in Senaki, McCain declared that Georgia was America's "best friend," and that Russian peacekeepers should be thrown out.

Today, Georgian forces from that same Senaki base are part of the invasion force into South Ossetia, an invasion that has left scores--perhaps hundreds--of dead locals, at least ten dead Russian peacekeepers, and 140 million pissed-off Russians calling for blood.

Lost in all of this is not only the question of why America would risk an apocalypse to help a petty dictator like Saakashvili get control of a region that doesn't want any part of him. But no one's bothering to ask what the Ossetians themselves think about it, or why they're fighting for their independence in the first place. That's because the Georgians--with help from lobbyists like Scheunemann--have been pushing the line that South Ossetia is a fiction, a construct of evil Kremlin neo-Stalinists, rather than a people with a genuine grievance.

A few years ago, I had an Ossetian working as the sales director for my now-defunct newspaper, The eXile. After listening to me rave about how much I always (and still do) like the Georgians, he finally lost it and told me another side to Georgian history, explaining how the Georgians had always mistreated the Ossetians, and how the South Ossetians wanted to reunite with North Ossetia in order to avoid being swallowed up, and how this conflict goes way back, long before the Soviet Union days. It was clear that the Ossetian-Georgian hatred was old and deep, like many ethnic conflicts in this region. Indeed, a number of Caucasian ethnic groups still harbor deep resentment towards Georgia, accusing them of imperialism, chauvinism and arrogance.

One example of this can be found in historian Bruce Lincoln's book, *Red Victory*, in which he writes about the period of Georgia's brief independence from 1917 to 1921, a time when Georgia was backed by Britain:

the Georgian leaders quickly moved to widen their borders at the expense of their Armenian and Azerbaijani neighbors, and their territorial greed astounded foreign observers. 'The free and independent socialist democratic state of Georgia will always remain in my memory as a classic example of an imperialist small nation,' one British journalist wrote.... "Both in territory snatching outside and bureaucratic tyranny inside, its chauvinism was beyond all bounds."

Ames also points to the little-noticed -- and apparently pre-planned -- PR offensive by Georgia to obscure the reality of the situation -- i.e., that Saakashvili provoked Russia's massive response with his own brutal military incursion into South Ossetia:

The invasion was backed up by a PR offensive so layered and sophisticated that I even got an hysterical call today from a hedge fund manager in New York, screaming about an "investor call" that Georgian Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze made this morning with some fifty leading Western investment bank managers and analysts. I've since seen a J.P. Morgan summary of the conference call, which pretty much reflects the talking points later picked up by the US media.

These kinds of conference calls are generally conducted by the heads of companies in order to give banking analysts guidance. But as the hedge fund manager told me today, "The reason Lado did this is because he knew the enormous PR value that Georgia would gain by going to the money people and analysts, particularly since Georgia is clearly the aggressor this time." As a former investment banker who worked in London and who used to head the Bank of Georgia, Gurgenedze knew what he was doing. "Lado is a former banker himself, so he knew that by framing the conflict for the most influential bankers and analysts in New York, that these power bankers would then write up reports and go on CNBC and argue Lado Gurgenedze's talking points. It was brilliant, and now you're starting to see the American media shift its coverage from calling it Georgia invading Ossetian territory, to the new spin, that it's Russian imperial aggression against tiny little Georgia."

The really scary thing about this investor conference call is that it suggests real planning. As the hedge fund manager told me, "These things aren't set up on an hour's notice."

Where this war is leading is impossible to say, but as Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention Chechnya, have shown, wars have a funny way of lasting longer, costing more in money and lives, and snuffing out whatever individual liberties the affected populations may have. As good as this war is for Saakashvili, who has become increasingly unpopular at home and abroad, or for

McCain, whose poll numbers seem to rise every time the plaque devours another lobe of his brain, it also bodes well for the resurgent Prime Minister Putin, who seems to have become increasingly peeved with his hand-picked successor, President Dmitry Medvedev's flickering independence and his liberalizer shtick. There's nothing like a good war to snuff out an uppity sois-disant liberal who's getting in your way--even McCain can still grasp this concept.

Justin Raimondo is also on the case, noting, among other points including , how Barack Obama's line on the conflict is quickly melding with that of McCain, and the usual "bipartisan foreign policy establishment" gang:

What's really interesting, however, is how Barack Obama has taken up this same cause, albeit with less vehemence than the GOP nominee. As Politico.com reported:

"When violence broke out in the Caucasus on Friday morning, John McCain quickly issued a statement that was far more strident toward the Russians than that of President Bush, Barack Obama, and much of the West. But, as Russian warplanes pounded Georgian targets far beyond South Ossetia this weekend, Bush, Obama, and others have moved closer to McCain's initial position."

While calling for mediation and international peacekeepers, Obama went with the War Party's line that Russia, not Georgia, is the aggressor, as the Times of London reports: "Obama accused Russia of escalating the crisis 'through it's clear and continued violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.'" While his first statement on the outbreak of hostilities was more along the lines of "Can't we all get along?", the New York Times notes:

"Mr. Obama did harden his rhetoric later on Friday, shortly before getting on a plane for a vacation in Hawaii. His initial statement, an adviser said, was released before there were confirmed reports of the Russian invasion. In his later statement, Mr. Obama said, 'What is clear is that Russia has invaded Georgia's sovereign - has encroached on Georgia's sovereignty, and it is very important for us to resolve this issue as quickly as possible.'"

This nonsense about Georgia's alleged "sovereignty" rides roughshod over the reality of the Ossetians' apparent determination to free themselves from Saakashvili's grip, and it's the buzzword that identifies a skill for the Georgians.

"I condemn Russia's aggressive actions," said Obama, "and reiterate my call for an immediate cease-fire." This cease-fire business is meant to feed directly into the Georgians' contention that they have offered to stop the conflict, even as they continue military operations in South Ossetia, which have already cost the lives of over a thousand of that country's inhabitants.

That didn't stop the McCainiacs from attacking Obama as a tool of the Kremlin. Sunday the news talk shows were abuzz with rumors of Democratic discontent over Obama's seeming inability to hit back at McCain's viciously negative campaign, yet it's much worse than that - it's not an unwillingness, but an inherent inability to do so. I hate to cite Andrew Sullivan favorably, but he was one of the first to note the convergence of the Obama camp and the McCain campaign on such central issues as Iran, and the process continues with this confluence of opinion on the Russian question. While the Obama people have dutifully pointed out that Randy Scheunemann, McCain's foreign policy guru, earned hundreds of thousands of dollars for his public relations firm as a paid lobbyist for the Georgians, their own candidate's position on the matter differs little from McCain's, except, as the New York Times notes, in terms of "style."

Finally, Jonathan Steele weighs in at the Guardian with "This is not pipeline war but an assault on Russian influence":

The flare-up of major hostilities between Russia and Georgia has been dubbed by some "the pipeline war". The landlocked Caspian sea's huge oil reserves are a factor, especially since Georgia became a key transit country for oil to travel from Baku in Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean.

The pipeline, which was completed in May 2006, is the second longest in the world. Although its route was chosen in order to bypass Russia, denying Moscow leverage over a key resource and a potential source of pressure, the current crisis in the Caucasus is about issues far bigger than oil.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is only a minor element in a much larger strategic equation: an attempt, sponsored largely by the United States but eagerly subscribed to by several of its new ex-Soviet allies, to reduce every aspect of Russian influence throughout the region, whether it be economic, political, diplomatic or military.

Needless to say, that inveterate old Cold Warrior, Dick Cheney, has been predictably vehement in his reaction. (Cheney has always appreciated the value of the "Russian threat" in advancing his lifelong agenda of establishing an authoritarian, militarist, belligerent, crony-capitalist regime in the United States.) In a call to buck up the Administration's Georgian protege, Cheney sputtered "that Russian aggression must not go unanswered, and that its continuation would have serious consequences for its relations with the United States, as well as the broader international community," the New York Times reports.

"Serious consequences"! Russkies on the march! Aggression! Kremlin! The crisis in Georgia is like a big dose of Viagra for these guys, taking them back to their hot youth and all the Cold War hubba-hubba. But let's hope that this hormonal outburst doesn't blind them totally to vastly different circumstances surrounding the current situation, and send that dormant fever spiking to nightmarish levels.

Chris Floyd has been a writer and editor for more than 25 years, working in the United States, Great Britain and Russia for various newspapers, magazines, the U.S. government and Oxford University. Floyd co-founded the blog Empire Burlesque, and is also chief editor of Atlantic Free Press. He can be reached at cfloyd72@gmail.com.

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