
What Is At Stake

By Richard Palmer
theTrumpet.com - 26/8/2008

The conquest of Russia by any foreign power has always been difficult. With the exception of Genghis Khan, no power has ever been able to subdue it. It's just too big. Napoleon and Hitler both met their comeuppance trying.

Though part of the problem is its size, topography is also very much on Russia's side. On its western frontier, the vast open flatlands of Ukraine, providing no cover to any eastward advancing incursion, and the extensive marshlands plus heavy forestation of Belarus tend to act as a buffer to aggression from the west. In the south, nature provides a fortress. Sandwiched between the Black and Caspian seas is the Caucasus, a narrow corridor leading up into Russia. This passage is guarded by the vast Caucasus Mountains. If one wishes to invade Russia further east, the endless plains, deserts and mountains of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan must first be conquered.

The Caucasus is crucial to Russia's defenses, and not just because of its location. It is key to Russia's fuel supplies also. In 1940 the French General Gamelen wrote, "Dependence on oil supplies from the Caucasus is the fundamental weakness of Russian economy. The Armed Forces were totally dependent on this source also for their motorized agriculture. More than 90 percent of oil extraction and 80 percent of refinement was located in the Caucasus (primarily Baku). Therefore, interruption of oil supplies on any large scale would have far-reaching consequences and could even result in the collapse of all the military, industrial and agricultural systems of Russia."

Hitler was obsessed with the area, especially Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. He was convinced Germany needed the oil in the Caucasus and the farmland in the Ukraine to be self-sufficient and invulnerable. Indeed, if Hitler had controlled these two areas, Germany could have produced all its own fuel and food.

Hitler, however, failed. While the Nazis made their way to Baku, the German 6th Army was defeated at Stalingrad. His panzers never made it through the Caucasus Mountains. Some historians believe that, had Hitler made it to Baku, the war would have ended very differently.

Today, 19 percent of proven world gas reserves are within nations bordering the Caspian, not including Russia. This area is expected to become a major area of oil and gas extraction, with oil production levels predicted to reach 4 billion barrels a day. Azerbaijan today has one of the largest known undeveloped offshore reserves in the world.

The Caucasus is the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Not only is there much fossil fuel in the Caucasus and in the Caspian Sea, but the area is also key to transporting oil and gas.

This small area is receiving more and more of the world's attention. The little nation of Georgia occupies a crucial strategic location on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains and the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Ukraine, on the northern shore of the Black Sea, is also key to controlling the Caucasus. In addition to housing Russia's Black Sea fleet and its continental ballistic missiles, Ukraine is a buffer state in defending Russia's south.

The allegiance of both Georgia and Ukraine is, in a way, crucial to the hegemonic plans for expansion of both the EU and Russia.

Europe is desperate for a fuel supply that comes with no strings attached. It is especially desperate for gas. Unlike oil, which often travels in containers, the only real way to move gas is through pipelines. Europe gets some gas from the North Sea. Some it imports from North Africa. That is not enough. Europe needs to get most of its gas from the east. Currently it comes from Russia, but Russia has no qualms about pulling the plug on the West when the urge arises.

Europe, fed up with this situation, is turning to new suppliers. Though Iran and other Middle Eastern nations such as Egypt have offered to fill the need, these sources may be just as unreliable as Russia, if not more so. Europe's only hope for gas, aside from the volatile, unpredictable Middle East, comes from the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. At the moment, all this gas travels to Europe via Russia. However, Europe has a number of projects underway to build pipelines directly from Europe to the Caucasus. Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Turkey, and is under a trade embargo from both Turkey and Azerbaijan, so no pipelines can travel through Armenia in the foreseeable future. All of these pipelines would have to travel through Georgia. It is the only possible route to get oil from the Caspian region to Europe without direct Russian or Iranian involvement.

With Russia now controlling Georgia, however, the bulk of Europe's gas must come from Russian-controlled territory or Iran.

This is what is at stake in this little nation. Control of Georgia means control of the Caucasus. It means that Europe is forced to choose between Russia and the Middle East for its gas.

Both Russia and Germany are on the rise. Each is trying to increase its power in the world. Germany is conquering the Balkans, and Russia now has control of Georgia. As these powers compete against each other, watch for a new Molotov-Ribbentrop pact to emerge. It may be that dealings are already underway to conclude such an agreement.

The Caucasus is Russia's Balkans. In Europe, control of the Balkans was imperative for the eastward expansion of the German-dominated European Union. For similar strategic reasons, just as Germany ruthlessly went after the Balkans, watch for Russia to ruthlessly consolidate its imperialist goals in the Caucasus.

<http://www.thetrumpet.com/index.php?q=5455.0.108.0>
