

## Editorial

### Russia Re-establishes its Imperialist Credentials

On August 8 Georgian military forces launched an all-out assault against the break-away province of South Ossetia, levelling the capital city of Tskhinvali and killing a reported 1,500 civilians and a number of Russian peacekeepers. A day later, Russian tanks, artillery and thousands of troops poured across the border, while Russian planes bombed military targets in both South Ossetia and Georgia. Military forces in Abkhazia, another *de facto* independent region of Georgia, also launched attacks against Georgian forces. By the time a ceasefire was declared five days later, Russian forces had essentially cut the country in half and had blocked Georgian access to the Black Sea. The ceasefire called for both sides to withdraw their forces to their pre-August 8 positions, but Russian officials stated that Georgia could forget about ever regaining sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Both the Russians and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili are claiming innocent victim status in this conflict. The Russians are claiming that Georgia launched an unprovoked attack against its citizens (70 percent of South Ossetians hold Russian passports), while Saakashvili is claiming that Russia's illegal invasion of Georgia had prompted the August 8 Georgian "counter-offensive". However, while both sides may be able to make a claim for victim status, neither side can claim innocence. There is more than enough blame to go around, not only to Russia and Georgia, but to the U.S. and European Union, as well.

While the Caucasus region has a long history of tribal and national conflicts, the roots of the present conflict are not to be found in ancient history, but in the U.S. efforts to destabilize the Soviet Union during

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### In His Own Words: Stephen Harper on the Invasion of Sovereign Nations

The Canadian ruling class maintains a double standard and extremely pragmatic attitude towards the principles of sovereignty, self-determination and military intervention. It is entirely dependent on whether the military interventions and other violations of sovereignty are committed by the U.S. and its allies or by its competitors. Prime Minister Stephen Harper is a good spokesperson for the Canadian ruling class on these issues as can be seen by the following quotations:

#### On Russia's Intervention in Georgia

"Military force will not resolve this dispute. The only viable long-term solution is international mediation

and peacekeeping. ... Russian and Georgian forces must immediately cease hostilities throughout Georgia and return to their August 6 positions. Furthermore, in escalating the conflict through its attacks on Georgian towns and cities outside South Ossetia, Russia has ceased to act as a peacekeeper. It is imperative that Russia respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia." -Statement from Stephen Harper released August 11, 2008.

"I must tell you that I am deeply troubled by a notion I see developing in Russia and that is a notion that Russia somehow has a say or some control over countries outside of its borders. In my judgment, this is a very worrisome development. It really indicates a

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the Cold War. One of the methods to achieve that was the pouring of millions of dollars into the hands of ethnic nationalist groups, especially in the western and Trans-Caucasian republics of the USSR, to stir up racial and ethnic hatred that had largely been eliminated during the period of socialism.

There are many small nations co-existing in the Trans-Caucasian region, the region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Since the 1920s, the borders of the Georgian SSR were changed several times, but at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s Abkhazia and South Ossetia were included within Georgia's borders as autonomous regions. Although the peoples of both regions expressed a desire to stay within the USSR when Georgia split from the union, Georgia ignored their right to self-determination (while demanding such a right for itself) and sought to keep them through force. During the ensuing wars, Georgian forces were driven out of most of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russian peacekeeping forces were stationed in them through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), of which Georgia was (and is) a member. For all intents and purposes, both regions have been independent from Georgia since 1993.

Georgia occupies a strategic area of the Caucasus, bordering on Turkey in the south and the Black Sea on the west. The U.S. has coveted the country, at least since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as a gateway to the vast Caucasian and Central Asian oil and gas resources. Since the early 1990s, Georgia has been reduced to little more than a U.S. protectorate. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline was completed in 2005 to transport oil from Central Asia to Turkey, and from Turkey to Europe. It was built by U.S. and European interests as a means of transporting oil from the region without passing through either Russian or Iranian territory. There are also plans to build a parallel gas pipeline, as well as an undersea pipeline from Turkey to Israel. Whoever controls Georgia controls access to Caucasian and Central Asia oil and gas. This is why the U.S. has been so adamant about fast-tracking Georgia into NATO in recent years.

Since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, Russia has been attempting to restore its past glory as a big power. It has suffered a series of humiliations at the hands of the Americans over the past several years as one after another of the former Soviet republics has joined NATO and the U.S. bloc. The U.S. and EU also ignored Russia's concerns over their recognition of Kosovo's independence from Serbia, treating Russia as a third-rate country of little significance. However, over the past several years Russia has taken advantage of the U.S. being bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan to reassert its power. Russia is itself a major oil and gas producing country and its economy has been buoyed by high energy prices. It has used that position to pressure the countries in its "near abroad", as well as various Western European countries. It has also established a very close relationship with China and, one by one, has pushed the U.S. out of the Central Asian republics which had allowed the U.S. to set up military bases during the initial period of U.S. aggression against Afghanistan. At the end of July Russia concluded a deal with Turkmenistan which gives the Russian company Gazprom a monopoly over gas exports from that country, including its exports to China. The deal does not appear to give Russia any economic benefits, but the strategic benefits are enormous, as it gives Russia a virtual stranglehold on world gas supplies. It also dealt a major blow to the U.S. imperialists who invaded Afghanistan and Iraq with precisely the same objective of gaining a monopoly over Central Asian energy resources.

It is clear that Georgia, whose army is supplied and trained by the Americans and Israelis, would never have launched a military assault against South Ossetia without the permission of its masters. It is not as clear what the U.S. sought to gain from the adventure. Perhaps it miscalculated Russia's willingness and/or ability to protect its own imperialist interests. Whatever the U.S. aim was, it clearly backfired. Russian imperialism flexed its muscles and attacked a U.S. client state, calling the American bluff. The U.S. is unable to respond militarily because it is tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan. The EU countries are unwilling to do anything because they are dependent on Russian natural gas. Georgia's

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# Doha Round Collapses as Inter-Imperialist Contradictions Intensify

The stage was set for a compromise but, in the end, none could be reached. The late July round of Doha talks collapsed in failure, despite a last-minute ministerial meeting and daily updates from negotiators about the progress being made. Once again, the biggest stumbling block was around agriculture, with the big powers, especially the United States and European Union, unable to reach an agreement on how to carve the world up amongst themselves.

Not only were the U.S. and EU unable to extract concessions, what became clear as the last-ditch effort to rescue the deal proceeded was that India, China, Russia and Brazil had very specific agendas on how they could assert their global power and they would simply not back down. While technically the Doha Round is now on hold until after the U.S. presidential elections in November 2008 and the Indian elections in May 2009, it seems unlikely that any agreement can be reached.

The failure is an indication that the relative strength of the big powers and regional powers within the world of international capital is undergoing profound changes. The economic power of the U.S. has been steadily declining over the past two decades while that of the emerging capitalist economies, especially those of China, India and, to some extent, Brazil has been rising. Russia is also rumoured to have played a much more active role at these talks, including announcing, in the midst of the negotiations, that it would be establishing state trading enterprises in agriculture. The Americans interpreted this as an openly hostile act, especially given reports that the Russians were counselling some of the smaller powers on how to protect their interests during the negotiations.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bi-polar division of the world the policy of U.S. imperialism has been to use its military power to establish a unipolar capitalist world under its dictate. Today, that policy is clearly in difficulty and a multi-

polar world is emerging despite all of the efforts of the Americans to prevent it.

This should not in any way be viewed as a victory for the people of the world. Far from it, the collapse of the WTO talks may well usher in a period of unbridled trade wars. Such an occurrence would exacerbate the crisis of overproduction and could quite possibly precipitate a global economic depression. It is clear that the EU and some of the other powers feel that a global depression at this time will result in a further weakening of the American imperialists, to their benefit. For their part, the Americans greeted the collapse of the talks with a renewed commitment to pursue their trade agenda through a series of bilateral agreements, an indication that U.S. imperialism is far from defeated. Indeed, the Americans will most likely use this as an opportunity to step up their attacks on the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America under the guise of free trade agreements.

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Soviet-era mentality. And I think it is something that all democratic countries should speak out strongly against, and I hope Russia will reconsider its actions.” Stephen Harper speaking to reporters in Newfoundland, August 15, 2008.

## **On the U.S. Intervention in Iraq**

“...there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein operates programs to produce weapons of mass destruction. Experience confirms this. British, Canadian and American intelligence leaves no doubt on the matter. Canada should stand with its allies to remove the Hussein regime. Failure to do so is not fitting with the

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armed forces are relatively weak and poorly trained. Just as the U.S. invaded tiny Grenada to restore its imperial status after its humiliating defeat at the hands of the Vietnamese people, Russia chose this war against Georgia to declare to the world that it is once again a power to be reckoned with. It is obvious from Russia's rapid response to Georgia's August 8 aggression that it was expecting the attack and most likely welcomed it, if it didn't actually manoeuvre the U.S. and Georgia into launching it.

The Russo-Georgian conflict demonstrates the truth of Lenin's observation that imperialism necessarily means war and aggression. In this case, both U.S. imperialism, Russian imperialism and the reactionary Georgian government bear equal blame for the loss of human life and destruction that has befallen the South Ossetian and Georgian people. They are all guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and should be condemned as such. This conflict also demonstrates the folly of small nations seeking to advance their national interests by subordinating themselves to one or another of the big powers. Despite their promises, all of Georgia's big power allies left it to face Russia on its own, sacrificing it as fodder to their own imperialist interests. For their part, the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will also learn that Russia has no interest in protecting their right to self-determination and independence, as the Chechen people have already learned. Russia will never permit those regions to become independent states, but will absorb them into its own territories.

The escalation of tensions in the Caucasus also increases the possibility of war between the big imperialist powers for the re-division of the world. The only hope for peace and security for the people of this region is to put an end to all alliances with the big powers and to establish a federation of Trans-Caucasian peoples capable of taking control of the energy resources of the region for their own benefit. So long as the big imperialist powers treat the area as if it belonged to them, the peoples of the region can only expect one disaster after another.

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greatness of our history or with our standing as a nation." – January 2003, speaking in the House of Commons

"In reading only the pools, indulging a juvenile and insecure anti-Americanism, this government has for the first time in our history left us outside our British and American allies in their time of need. ... In the final analysis, disarming Iraq is necessary for the long-term security of the world, to the collective interest of our historic allies and, therefore, manifestly it is in the national interest of this country." – March 2003, House of Commons

"The Canadian Alliance – the official Opposition in Parliament – supports the American and British position because we share their concerns, their worries about the future if Iraq is left unattended to, and their fundamental vision of civilization and human values." Letter from Stephen Harper to the *Wall Street Journal*, published March 28, 2003

"On the justification for the war, it wasn't related to finding any particular weapons of mass destruction. In our judgement, it was much more fundamental. It was the removing of a regime that was hostile, that clearly had the intention of constructing weapons systems ..." Stephen Harper, quoted in *Maclean's* magazine, August 25, 2003

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