

The War in the Caucuses and the Strategic World Situation

(from *Aufstand – today Revolutionärer Kampf* – Jan. 2009)

[Introductory Note: The on-going crisis in the Ukraine is a current focal point of inter-imperialist contention. Conflicting – interpenetrating and multi-layered – imperialist interests are being pursued at the cost of great suffering for the people. This is not, as some assert, the start of a new “cold-war”, but rather an expression of the transition from the essentially unipolar world dominated by US-Imperialism that emerged in the wake of the collapse of the imperialist Soviet Union and its block at the end of the 1980’s to a world in which a number of competing – and shifting – centers of power imperialist power contend for regional and world influence and power. As background information for understanding these developments we are re-issuing this article that was first published in our newspaper in January 2009.]

The weapons have – for now at least – stopped firing in the Caucuses, but with the US sending warships to Georgian harbours and Russia’s recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abhasien this crisis continues to make itself felt in international affairs. As the surveys of damage and destruction are done, it is already clear that big power manoeuvring and rivalry has brought great suffering and loss to tens of thousands of people. A reliable figure for the total of dead and injured is still not known, it is certain to be at least several hundred if not more. Oppressed people of different nationalities are being pitted against one another and brutally sacrificed by ruling classes whose only interest is to dominate them and the world as a whole.

Although this conflict came for many as a surprise, it has in fact been brewing for months – even years. More importantly it reflects significant, and to an extent profound, changes in world imperialist power relations. What follows are some of the main points which bear mentioning in order to understand the underlying class interests which are at stake here:

1. A resurgent imperialist Russia is asserting itself and making clear that it has now regained enough strength to resist further US efforts to encircle and permanently undermine its global ambitions. As the Maoist political economist Raymond Lotta pointed out in a recent series of articles in the newspaper *Revolution*, “Shifts and Faultlines in the World Economy and Great Power Rivalry” (see www.revcom.us):

“An increasingly assertive, raw-materials-based Russian imperialism reaching out to and exerting pressure on Western Europe, countering U.S. moves and promoting its own imperial interests in energy-rich Central Asia, entering into forms of strategic partnership with China across wide swaths of Eurasia, and providing high-technology assistance and advanced weapons to countries like Iran, Venezuela, etc.” (from Part 1)

“One of the features of the current situation is the growing convergence of interests of China and Russia in key arenas and the multiplication of Sino-Russian ties and cooperation. In 2006, China became the number one economic partner of Russia, and China has also been financing important Russian pipeline projects—which will be discussed in the next installment of this series.

Both China and Russia are providing arms to oil and gas producers in the Third World. Both are increasing their military capability in key energy producing regions. And both powers joined together in 2001 to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of Central Asian countries.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a major development in world relations. China's economic growth and rise in the world economy are increasingly finding expression in the geopolitical and military realms. The SCO is a regional energy alliance and a regional security alliance in Central Asia. Its core member states are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The SCO is bringing together Chinese economic strength with Russian military capability and energy resources. In the summer of 2007, the SCO conducted its first military exercises. This was also the first time that Chinese airborne troops were deployed outside Chinese territory.

The SCO is clearly aimed at reducing and countering U.S. influence in Central Asia and at concentrating certain strengths, and overcoming certain weaknesses, of Russia and China—and drawing others around them. This is a fledgling but significant vehicle of rivalry in a volatile, energy-rich region of the world.” (from Part 2)

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the imperialist bloc it was leading the US has had two key policy goals vis a vis Russia. The first involves stripping away as many of the former Soviet Republics as possible – in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia – and integrate them into the US sphere of influence. This means gaining control of the people and resources of these countries – including especially the energy resources – as well as obtaining a hold on geo-strategically important areas. The US has envisioned establishing an arc of military bases *directly on Russia's border* from the Baltic countries all the way through Central Asia to China. The idea being that such an economic, political and military headlock could prevent Russia – which still maintains a nuclear arsenal that is, in destructive terms, probably more or less equal to that of the US – from ever again challenging the US on a global level. Gaining such a strategic advantage over Russia is a key element in the US's overall plans to obtain and fortify US-imperialist global hegemony.

The second major policy goal has been to manage this effort in a way that does not lead to a total collapse of Russia. Such a collapse would create tremendous instability throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East (and even the world as a whole). And a collapse also brings with it the spectre of mass rebellion and even revolution in a major imperialist country. In this context, it has been very important for the US to proceed in a way that would not unnecessarily provoke a military confrontation with Russia. Even at its most weakened point, Russia had enough nuclear warheads and delivery systems to destroy the US and a large part of the world with it (even if it would have itself been destroyed as well).

As part of this later aspect, Gorbachev claims that Bush Sr. promised that NATO would not expand eastward. Clinton and Bush Jr have ignored this promise and have brought into NATO almost all the countries that used to make up the Soviet-led Warsaw Treaty Block. At the same time the US has made clear that now matter what “democratic reforms” take place in Russia itself, it will not be allowed to join NATO as it is currently structured (i.e. is under US leadership). When this is combined with the Baltic States, countries directly bordering Russia, being brought into NATO it is unmistakable that NATO expansion is in fact aimed against Russia. The US is now seeking to extend the encirclement of Russia by giving NATO membership to the Ukraine and Georgia.

To achieve this aim the US spent tens (possibly hundreds) of millions of dollars to organize and finance the so-called “coloured revolutions” in the Ukraine and Georgia (in the Ukraine it was “orange” and in Georgia “rose”) that brought to power anti-Russian/pro-US governments.

Russia has been using every method at its disposal (economic, diplomatic, political, and military) to counter these moves by the US. After all, major portions of what is now the Ukraine have been ruled

by/been a part of Russia/the Soviet Union for over 250 years and in that time have been both a key agricultural region as well as important industrial centre for the Russian/Soviet economy.

Beyond this, losing the Ukraine to NATO would mean that Russia's strategic depth – the amount of territory an invading force must cross to reach Moscow and the other major cities of the European part of Russia – would be greatly reduced. This strategic depth played a key role in the defeat of the invasions of Russia/the Soviet Union led by Napoleon in the 19th century and Hitler in the 20th. An entry by the Ukraine into NATO, as it is currently structured, would almost certainly result in a major international crisis, if not war.

For its part, although Georgia is a small country with no major resources or industry of its own, it does have a very strategic position on Russia's southwestern flank and in relation to Russian access to the Black Sea. In addition, from a geo-economic standpoint it plays a key role in potential Western access to oil and gas in Central Asia. It is currently the only country through which westward reaching pipelines from Central Asia can pass without going through territory under Russian or Iranian control.

When, in 1991, Georgia split off from the collapsing Soviet Union, the Russian government took steps to secure its hold on Georgia. Because the Georgian economy was still dependent on its links with Russia and on Russian energy supplies, Russia had a great deal of "soft-power" leverage to bring to bear. In addition, it supported efforts by the provinces of Abkhazia as well as South Ossetia to separate themselves from the control of the central Georgian government in Tbilisi.

Since that time Russia has brokered a number of cease-fires agreed to by all sides and which established a joint Russian, Georgian, Ossetian peacekeeping force. This force has been internationally monitored by observers from the OSCEⁱ. As part of that agreement, Georgia promised not to use military force to attempt to re-establish control over either of these provinces. These agreements are now rarely – if ever – mentioned in the western press.ⁱⁱ

Along with these developments Eduard Shevardnadse, the former Soviet foreign minister under Gorbatschow who became head of the Georgian governing council and later president, established a kind of status-quo with Russia by joining the CIS (the Russian-led Confederation of Independent States), agreeing not to seek NATO membership and overall recognising Russian regional hegemony. The US was determined to break up this arrangement.

In 2003 the US sponsored what was essentially a coup (the so-called Rose Revolution) led by the current Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili that overthrew the government of Shevardnadse. Although the Shevardnadse government had also been "elected", the new regime of the US-educated and trained Saakashvili was quickly recognised. Following this, new "elections" were held which Saakashvili easily won. One of his main election promises was to return Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgian control – at least implying the use of military force if necessary.ⁱⁱⁱ

The US immediately began a massive program to train and supply the Georgian armed forces. Thus tiny Georgia with a total population of around 4.5 million people had 2,000 troops taking part in the occupation of Iraq – the 3rd largest foreign contingent after the US and UK^{iv}. At the time the recent fighting began, the US admitted to having around 125 "military advisors" stationed in Georgia. What is not so well known, is that Israel has also been playing a major role in the Georgian military build-up. An Israeli was brought in to be the Georgian defence minister and Georgia has purchased large amounts of Israeli made weapons – especially artillery rockets and cluster shells^v. Press reports indicate that over 1,000 Israeli "advisors" were in Georgia at the time it launched its attack on South Ossetia.

Not only was the build-up to the attack well known, but also the International Crisis Group (ICG) – an imperialist think tank that masquerades as an NGO – reports that in the weeks and months before it was launched various European diplomats travelled to Tbilisi to warn Saakashvili against taking such action^{vi}. In an effort to put some distance between itself and Saakashvili, even the US is now claiming that in July Secretary of State Rice told Saakashvili not to use force to try to regain control over the two provinces.

Of course, if the US was really opposed to such an attack, then why did 1,000 US troops take part in joint exercises with Georgian forces *in Georgia* and named “Immediate Response 2008” just weeks before the attack was launched?! This was hardly a signal to Saakashvili to exercise restraint. It seems much more an answer to the large-scale Russian manoeuvres that took place in July in North Ossetia (part of Russia, just across the border to Georgia and South Ossetia). At that time some 8,000 Russian soldiers and hundreds of tanks and planes reportedly demonstrated Russia’s ability to deploy military strength in the region.

Given the number of US and Israeli advisors in Georgia (and not just military advisors), and their presence throughout the Georgian government it is, as George Friedman from Stratfor wrote, “...inconceivable that the Americans were unaware of Georgia’s mobilization and intentions”(Stratfor Newsletter, 12.8.2008). Given the current confirmed information is it not possible right now to say for certain if the Bush administration gave Saakashvili the go-ahead, gave conflicting messages or just decided to look the other way as he prepared and launched the attack. What is fairly certain is that at least Saakashvili seemed to believe that with Putin in Beijing for the Olympics, the Georgians could quickly overrun the relatively small number of Russian peace-keeping troops in South Ossetia, bring the entire province under their control and block the Roki Tunnel^{vii} before Russia could organize a serious response. They would, in the Israeli tradition, “create facts on the ground” that all would just have to accept. On the night of August 7/8 Georgian forces initiated a massive artillery barrage aimed at Tskhinvali the capital of South Ossetia. Georgian forces backed up by tanks and planes stormed into the province and attempted to occupy the city. In doing so they, according to Russian sources, attacked a base of the Russian peace-keeping forces killing around a dozen soldiers and wounding many more.

As is now obvious, this was a major miscalculation. The Russians struck back quickly and decisively. The stunned Georgian forces seemed to have fallen into panic and fled southward toward Tbilisi leaving huge quantities of arms and ammunition behind (according to Russian sources, including at least 65 tanks). In a desperate effort to save the regime in Tbilisi from possible collapse the US flew – in one day – the *entire* Georgian contingent of 2,000 soldiers in Iraq, back to Georgia. An embarrassingly quick exit for another member of the now infamous “coalition of the willing”!

The once swaggering Saakashvili has now been reduced to ranting in the Western media about Russian designs to overrun and annex Georgia (there is actually no real sign of this and it does not currently make much sense from a Russian point of view) and how Prague or even Paris will be next. Russia has publicly stated that it will not deal with Saakashvili and has called for his replacement. Observers in Germany and elsewhere are saying that it is indeed very possible that he will be forced to exit the scene in the next 3 to 9 months.

And while Russia, the US and some other western countries are now trading charges and counter-charges about who has violated which international law or treaty – as usual, they all have – the key thing here is that Russia has implemented the one principle that really matters to the imperialists: might makes right.

This failed offensive by Georgia is a major blow to the whole US strategy to encircle and permanently cripple Russia. It has revealed to the reactionary ruling classes all around the world the current limits of US power in this region – and showcased the newfound Russian strength. Aside from declarations about Russian actions being “unacceptable” and “having consequences”, neither the US nor its close allies have taken any serious action. In this instance at least, it is Russia and not the US that has now drawn a line in the sand and created “facts on the ground”. The US along with all the other imperialist powers have so far been forced to accept what has happened and decide what it means for their future power calculations. It is no longer 1989 and as Lenin talked about it, the law of uneven development has again asserted itself.^{viii}

2. NATO as a cohesive military alliance with a unified aim and agreed common enemy no longer exists. On one level this seems obvious since the common enemy – the Warsaw Treaty countries led by the Soviet Union – was officially dissolved in a meeting in Prague on July 1, 1991. Indeed, the Soviet Union itself has exited history’s stage. Thus, over the last 15 years or so there has been a struggle within NATO about its role and future.

Historically NATO has been dominated and led by the US. The civilian secretary of NATO has always been a European (currently Jaap de Hoop Scheffer from the Netherlands), but the military commander (SACEUR – Supreme Allied Commander Europe) has always been a US-American general – at the present time Gen. Bantz Craddock. NATO was founded after WWII in preparation for a possible world war with the then Soviet-led Socialist Camp (which at the time was essentially socialist – but became social-imperialist in the mid-50’s following the death of Stalin). In order to get the other imperialists to join the US agreed that all NATO decisions would be made on a consensus basis. This means that *any* NATO country can prevent joint action by the others (at least on paper) by refusing to agree on some action.

As long as the only action NATO would take was a full-scale mobilization for a world war with the Soviet-led block, this provision for consensus decisions was not a major problem for the US. But since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its bloc (the bi-polar world order as the imperialists called it) things have changed dramatically. With the coming to power of the Bush regime the US embarked on a worldwide offensive to establish its unchallenged global hegemony – a unilateral world on top of which it would sit. The other imperialists and major powers, including not only Russia but also France, Germany, China, Japan and a number of others have sought to establish a “multi-polar” world order in which what they consider to be their legitimate interests are taken into account and the US does not dictate the terms and conditions of imperialist plunder of the world.^{ix}

In this context, the US has sought to turn NATO into an instrument of US world domination and to expand it eastward to the borders of the Soviet Union. As Bush remarked at the NATO summit in Romania in April 2008: "See, NATO is no longer a static alliance focused on defending Europe from a Soviet tank invasion. It is now an expeditionary alliance that is sending its forces across the world to help secure a future of freedom and peace for millions." (*Washington Times*, 2.4.2008 – of course where Bush says “freedom and peace” one should read “death, destruction and plunder”).

While the other western imperialist powers all share to an extent the US efforts to limit a Russian resurgence (they prefer a Russia more their size), as stated above many of them are opposed to the US’s overall strategic goal of world hegemony. This does not mean they are currently seeking to form an opposing block for a showdown with the US. But it does mean that they will resist where they can US moves that do not serve their interests.

This has resulted in a NATO that is currently deeply split and most often incapable of unified military action. One major exception to this was the war in Kosovo. In that instance, the convergence of German and US interests in wanting to emasculate Serbia enabled the US to force the others – in particular France^x – to go along. Because Serbia was allied with Russia the US sought to further reduce Russian influence in Europe by dismembering Serbia. Germany was seeking to re-establish its traditional sphere of influence in the Balkans through supporting its traditional ally Croatia^{xi}, whose main rival in the region is Serbia. When the US/German partnership on this question emerged the UK, which is more closely aligned to the US overall, had to reverse its support for Serbia (which the UK had also traditionally seen as a barrier to German power in the region) and go along as well.

While this war mainly ended on terms the US sought, the US was so frustrated by the fact that all major decisions during this war had to be approved in advance by committees made up of all the NATO countries participating, that after the war it stated that no US forces would ever again go into battle in such conditions under NATO command! Thus Rumsfeld's famous statement following the attacks on September 11 that now the mission would determine the coalition and not the coalition (ie. NATO) the mission.

Despite the relative unity displayed in the Kosovo war, in an overall sense the split in NATO is indeed real. It was a major success for the US to get NATO to officially join in the occupation of Afghanistan (the so-called ISAF mission). At the same time, the actual terms this has taken place on, is also a sign of weakness. While overthrowing the Taliban regime and its militia was relatively easy, the US and its allies in Afghanistan were not able to pacify the country (particularly as the insurgency in Iraq spread and grew in strength). This led to the US calling for NATO as an organisation to officially join in the occupation, take over ISAF and to expand ISAF to cover the entire country. In return for Germany, France Italy and Spain sending troops (or not pulling out), the US has placed around 17,000 of its forces – at least formally – under NATO command^{xii}. Another 18,000 remain independent of NATO and operate in Afghanistan as part of what is called “Operation Enduring Freedom” (OEF). OEF currently includes operations not only in Afghanistan, but the Philippines, Horn of Africa and Trans Sahara as well.

Although NATO agreeing to take over the ISAF operation appears to be an expression of alliance unity, with the exception of the UK, Netherlands and Canada, the other NATO troops are under what are called “national caveats”. This means that they cannot be sent into any fighting outside of their designated areas of responsibility without the specific prior approval of their governments. This approval is almost never given. The overwhelming bulk of the fighting has been in the South and East along the border with Pakistan and the troops from Germany, France, Italy etc. have been assigned sectors mainly in the North and West where the Taliban and other forces currently opposed to the US-led presence are relatively weak. Thus the vast bulk of the forces under NATO command, while carrying out occupation duties, are not taking direct part in the killing and dying.

The US has been deeply frustrated by this situation. The more it gets bogged down in both Iraq and Afghanistan and the more exhaustion its ground forces experience, the more it has insisted that the reluctant NATO “allies” join fighting. Prior to the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, US Defence Secretary Gates travelled through Europe making a series of public statements in which he demanded that Germany send its troops in Afghanistan into the fighting. He warned that if Germany refused it would bear the responsibility for “splitting” NATO. He declared it to be unacceptable for only some of the alliance members to be doing most of the “bleeding”. Despite this unprecedented public pressure, when the summit took place Germany held to its position and while agreeing to

authorize an additional thousand troops, flatly refused to lift its caveat and re-deploy its forces to the areas of heavy fighting.

Around this time France's President Sarkozy was making a big show of how France was prepared to actively come to the US's aid. However since that time it appears that only an additional 700 to 800 French troops have deployed to Afghanistan (a drop in the bucket compared to the number needed to make any real difference) and they too appear to remain under a national caveat which keeps them away from the main areas of sustained combat.

Along with this dispute an even bigger one erupted at the same summit over the question of NATO membership for Georgia and the Ukraine. Before the summit Bush himself was publicly demanding that NATO agree to grant Georgia and the Ukraine "Membership Action Plan" (MAP) status. This is essentially a fast-track roadmap for bringing a country into NATO within a period of a couple of years. Again, despite massive public pressure from the US (and even some veiled threats) Germany, France, Italy and Spain all refused.

The reason is quite simple: as mentioned above, these countries do not see their imperialist interests best served by the US being able to cement a unilateral world order under US domination. They strive for a multi-lateral world. In addition, as has also been mentioned, the world has continued to change in many ways since 1989. For example, today Russia is a major trading partner with the EU and a lucrative field of investment for west European capital. Russia currently supplies the rest of Europe with 25% of its oil and 50% of its natural gas. A new "cold war" is not in the cards.

The US constantly complains that Western Europe is making itself dependent on Russia and susceptible to Russian "blackmail". But for the major European powers the opposite is the case. They see the ability to obtain much needed energy supplies from Russia as a way to counterbalance their dependence on oil from the Middle East and Persian Gulf: supplies which are under US control. Looked at in this fashion, supplies from Russia make them less susceptible to US blackmail! Bringing the Ukraine and Georgia into NATO and the strain it would place on the relations with Russia serves no useful purpose from their point of view.

More particularly, they have absolutely no stomach for bringing countries into NATO which are involved in territorial or, as is currently the case with Georgia, military disputes and conflicts with Russia. They want to avoid any situation where their NATO obligations might be used to try to force them into some kind of military confrontation with Russia. And certainly any resulting from the actions of someone like Saakashvili, who is widely viewed as an unstable and even dangerous element.^{xiii}

Thus, even though some observers are saying that the recent conflict in Georgia will lead to both Georgia and the Ukraine being more quickly integrated into NATO – and the press in the US and its close allies are loudly calling for this – there is now little or no chance that this will happen under current conditions.^{xiv}

When German Chancellor Merkel visited Tbilisi shortly after the fighting stopped, some interpreted the remarks she made as being in favour of bringing Georgia into NATO. Actually although her words were carefully chosen to give the *impression* of supporting the US position, she actually *said just the opposite*. Her statement that Georgia "will, if it chooses, become a member of NATO" was followed in the very next sentence by the words that she "saw no reason to question the decision taken in Bucharest".

But what was the decision in Bucharest? Exactly that Germany, France and others had *blocked* MAP status for Georgia making the promised NATO membership a mere formality without concrete meaning. Just prior to the April summit Merkel had justified this position by stating that: “Countries which themselves are involved regional or internal conflicts, cannot, from my point of view, become NATO members.”

The true meaning of Merkel’s statement in Tbilisi was not lost on US Secretary of State Rice who just a couple of days later made the following comments while visiting Poland: “I don’t want to sound overbearing, but there was a very big territorial conflict when NATO was founded. Its name was East Germany. We did not for that reason prevent West Germany from joining NATO.” While designed as a riposte to Merkel and the German position, this statement was disingenuous to say the least.

As Rice is well aware, West Germany did not “ask” to join NATO at that time, the US *demand*ed that it do so. The decision by the government of Konrad Adenauer to go along with this demand and join NATO in 1955 resulted in a massive wave of debate and protest in West Germany since it was accompanied by the re-establishment of a German army (the Bundeswehr), compulsory military service and the stationing of nuclear weapons in Germany (including in units of the Bundeswehr). And it closed the door to any near term re-unification of Germany (which the West German imperialists saw as their main strategic goal).

But absent the opposing block to the East, and given the failure (at least up until now) of the US drive for unquestioned hegemony, there is no longer the compulsion for the German imperialists to acquiesce to such demands. This is a reality of today’s world that Ms. Rice and those she serves are increasingly being confronted with.

This reality has not only led to strains in NATO, but also raises the possibility of it even tearing apart. This was made especially clear when at the beginning of 2007 the US made public that it was starting formal talks with Poland and the Czech Republic regarding the stationing of a US anti-missile system in those countries. This announcement came as a shock to at least Germany, France and Italy, who by all appearances learned about this by reading the newspapers. During the period of the East/West confrontation such a unilateral move by the US would have been unthinkable.

What does it tell the European powers when the US is prepared to initiate such a measure, which has such profound implications for the question of war and peace in Europe, without any prior consultation– or even notification? What does it say about the concept of NATO and/or EU unity if countries like Poland and the Czech Republic are prepared to go behind the backs of their ostensible allies to negotiate such a deal with the US? And what is the US trying to achieve in acting in this fashion? After all, what real point is there both in creating such friction among its “allies” as well as with Russia for a system that is unproven, and which, according to the US is supposed to protect against Iranian missiles and nuclear warheads – weapons that do not even currently exist?

The US has three main goals here: 1. As Russia points out, these missiles are actually mainly aimed against its strategic weapons. The US claims that only 10 interceptor missiles will be stationed, but that may be just the start (and who knows, maybe they will work). Once these bases are in place they can be expanded. Already the US has announced that advanced Patriot missiles will be stationed as well: to “defend” these bases from possible Russian attack. Most importantly, the US wants to assert its “right” to station forces and weapons closer to Russia. It seeks to establish a precedent and to enlarge its recognized sphere of influence and “vital security interests”. 2. It wants to demonstrate to all the major European powers (“old Europe”) that it has the strength to go behind their backs and act unilaterally,

even on the question of war and peace in Europe. That being the case, so the message here, they need to fall into line or face serious consequences. In a political sense, these missiles are aimed westward as well and do not have to actually work to achieve this goal. 3. It wants to demonstrate to the countries lying between Germany and Russia (“new Europe”), that it has the will and the means to protect their interests vis a vis their large neighbours to the east and west. It is telling them: stick with me, I am your ticket to a bigger piece of imperialist plunder.

The actions discussed above, along with fact that the US has done things like tear up the ABM-Treaty and refuse to ratify the treaty on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe are not just family spats. They are all an expression of real, and deepening, fissures and fault lines that are opening up between the US and many of its former allies on the European continent. In the context of shifting and changing power relations, it is not unthinkable that one or more major shocks could cause former pillars of the imperialist world order to crack and even fall allowing new, and even previously unthinkable, alignments to emerge.^{xv}

3. The EU and Europe. As Raymond Lotta has also pointed out: “The consolidation of the European Union (EU) as extended into central and Eastern Europe and the creation of a coherent monetary zone around the euro, which, taken together, pose an economic challenge to U.S.-dollar hegemony and represent an embryonic, alternative framework of governance to a U.S.-led imperial order.” (Part 1) This is very true and is a key element in the new world order that is emerging. Without question, the major continental powers seek to strengthen the unity of this emerging pole of power as a key vehicle for pursuing their global interests.

At the same time Europe remains a continent and not a country. Efforts to achieve some kind of EU-wide truly “unified European foreign and security policy” cannot under current conditions succeed. The basic reason for this is that national capital formations cannot separate themselves from their national base. They must have a state that represents their interests politically and militarily. Even though imperialism has long since meant that the circuits of capital have become internationalised and today we are experiencing imperialist globalisation, this continues to be the case.

The establishment of EU institutions, a single market and the euro – as significant as they are economically and politically – have not resulted in a merging of the various national capital formations of the major European powers (at least not yet). As long as this remains the case, it will most likely be impossible for all of them to achieve any kind of firm or lasting unity around the central geo-political questions they currently face.

In addition, the US is constantly working to use the contradictions among the European countries to its own advantage: taking actions to exacerbate their differences and playing them off against one another. When the US speaks of European unity in an approving fashion, it means European unity under US leadership and aligned with US goals.

There are those countries that do indeed see their strategic interests more closely aligned with the US even as they at the same time are part of the EU and benefit economically there from. Traditionally this has been true for the UK and the Netherlands, but is true as well for many of the eastern European countries that were part of the former Soviet-block: Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States, etc.

The talk of a fundamental “European identity”, or the need for Europe to “speak with one voice” on world affairs remains as illusory as it was 50 or 100 years ago when Europeans regularly engaged in mutual mass slaughter. After all, don’t those in Germany who speak this way realize that you cannot

talk about Europe without including Russia?^{xvi} Russia was a major European power 200 years before Germany came into existence as a unified state! This is a geo-strategic fact of life that with the end of the East/West confrontation is once again asserting itself.

Russia is the world's largest country in terms of area. The US, for all its size, covers 4 time zones. Russia has 11. It has direct land borders with 14 different countries stretching from Finland all the way to China (and even shares a border with the US – albeit between two islands in the Bering Strait). A large percentage of the world's population lives in the countries along Russia perimeter or within just a few hours flying time beyond. Together with its large and relatively well-educated population, massive natural resources, industrial potential and military technology and strength Russia is without question a major European *and* Asian power: one with global ambitions. Every country in Europe must take this into its geo-strategic calculations.

For Germany, France and some other countries of “old Europe”, Russia is no longer mainly a threat, but an opportunity and potential ally; even as they still remain – for now – more closely tied to the US. How this change will express itself in the future is still unclear, and only actual events can reveal. But Russia's growing strength, and the will to exert it, along with the growth of China coupled with the US's continued efforts to cement a unipolar order are all factors which are pulling at the fabric of the existing imperialist alliances and contributing to the shifting instability we are seeing today.

There is certainly the possibility that a “core Europe” consisting perhaps of Germany, France, Italy, Spain and some others will emerge to pursue a more unified set of goals which could be more closely aligned with Russia and China and more openly in opposition to the US – though still wavering between these two poles. The unity that Germany and France had with Russia in opposition to the US invasion of Iraq is an example of this that we have already witnessed. And as the crisis in the Caucasus is now demonstrating, similar events are likely to follow: recasting, leaps and ruptures are on the agenda. This also has profound implications for the possibility of revolutionary openings emerging unexpectedly and with entirely new features.

The long years of the East/West confrontation and the relatively static features of power relations in Europe that resulted were ripped asunder by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its block and are now being remoulded by Russia's re-emergence. There are many in Europe who, as a result of the long years of relative stability (which actually rested on the threat and real danger of nuclear world war) are now having a difficult time gaining their bearings in a world so characterized by the current state of flux. This goes for both the various ruling classes, as well as forces among the people.

There are influential voices in Europe who say that the future of “old Europe” must be seen in a framework more closely tied to Russia and China. In a recent article (written before the fighting in Georgia) former German Chancellor Schröder wrote: “With the end of the Cold War and bi-polarity we experienced a transitional phase of American dominance. Now the world is searching for a new order, and everything is pointing to a future in which world politics will have a number of poles. Along with the USA the global importance of Russia, India and China is growing. Whether a united Europe will have the strength to develop into a significant actor in world politics remains open. Current events and setbacks still give no grounds for optimism.” (*Die Zeit*, 17.7.08).

This is in essence a warning to those in the ruling class in Germany (and its potential allies in “old Europe”) who have still not opened their eyes, that successfully following their reactionary interests in an emerging new world order requires them to take careful stock of the fundamental changes that are

occurring and to react accordingly. Nothing less is required of those who seek a radically different new world – one where all that Schröder represents is only to be found in the pages of history.

ⁱ OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The OSCE was officially established in 1994 but is rooted in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 that established the CSCE (Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe). 56 countries from Europe, Central Asia and North America participate.

ⁱⁱ “The June 24, 1992, Sochi Agreement established a cease-fire between the Georgian and South Ossetian forces and defined both a zone of conflict around the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and a security corridor along the border of South Ossetian territories. The Agreement also created the Joint Control Commission (JCC), and a peacekeeping body, the Joint Peacekeeping Forces group (JPKF). The JCC was charged with demilitarizing the security zone in the conflict region and facilitating negotiations; it is Co-Chaired by Georgian, Russian, South Ossetian, and North Ossetian representatives. The JPKF is under Russian command and is comprised of peacekeepers from Georgia, Russia, and Russia’s North Ossetian autonomous republic (as the separatist South Ossetian government remained unrecognized). South Ossetian peacekeepers, however, serve in the North Ossetian contingent. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreed to monitor the ceasefire and facilitate negotiations.” (from US State Department Fact Sheet, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, March 31, 2008 – see www.usa.gov).

ⁱⁱⁱ Although the western press is now trumpeting Saakashvili and his government as being “democratically elected”, just a few months ago they were writing editorials calling him “autocratic”. The imperialist think tank International Crisis Group (ICG) wrote in December 2007: “The government’s repressive and disproportionate response to peaceful protests in November 2007 shocked Western capitals, which had viewed Georgia as a beacon of democracy in a region of illiberal regimes. Since the Rose Revolution, however, President Mikheil Saakashvili’s administration has become increasingly intolerant of dissent... The leadership has also cut too many corners. In particular, the concentration of power in a small, like-minded elite and unwillingness to countenance criticism have undermined its democratic standing. Cronyism is increasingly evident within the senior level of the administration. Checks and balances have been stripped back, justice arbitrarily applied, human rights too often violated and freedom of expression curtailed... The government’s actions... remain troublingly authoritarian... November protesters were arrested or fined; opposition activists continue to be targeted, state resources are being used for Saakashvili’s campaign, and the line between the governing party and the state is blurred.” (Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?, Europe Report Nr.189, 19 December 2007)

^{iv} Although around 4,500 British troops remain in Iraq, they have withdrawn to an airfield near Basra. They carry out little of no combat activities and have for all practical purposes ceased to be active participants in the war leaving the US essentially alone.

^v Cluster shells and bombs are weapons which contain hundreds or thousands of very small “bomblets”. These weapons are fired or dropped on a target and the bomblets (small explosives similar to a small hand grenade) spread out over a large area and explode. Using such weapons in civilian areas is considered by most countries to be a war crime. Typically 5% to 10% of the bomblets fail to explode and remain on the ground. Due to their small size and bright colour they are then often picked up by children and played with and otherwise pose a hazard to civilians similar to that of landmines. Just days before the Israeli attack on Lebanon in 1996 came to an end the Israelis forces fired hundreds of cluster shells into villages in southern Lebanon containing literally millions of bomblets. This spread thousands of unexploded bomblets throughout this area and later resulted in hundreds of civilian injuries and deaths long after the fighting came to an end.

^{vi} “Starting in March, talk of war – an attack on the southern part of Abkhazia – had been rife in Tbilisi. A senior European diplomat said that U.S., German and European Union (EU) leaders had on repeated occasions talked Saakashvili out of launching an attack. Each conversation worked for ‘about two weeks’, the official said.” (ICG, *Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout*, Europe Report Nr.195, 22 August 2008).

^{vii} The Roki Tunnel is a tunnel between North and South Osseti that leads under the mountains separating the two. It is the only road connection in the region through which reinforcements can pass. Although many now say that the Georgian offensive could never have succeeded, if they had reached the Roki Tunnel before Russia effectively reacted, it just might have.

^{viii} In his famous work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* Lenin wrote: “...for there can be *no* other conceivable basis under capitalism for the sharing out of spheres of influence, of interests, of colonies, etc., than a calculation of the *strength* of the participants in the share out, their general, economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the share out does not change to an equal degree, for under capitalism the development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry or countries cannot be *even*... Therefore, ‘inter-imperialist’ or ‘ultra-imperialist’ alliances in the realities of the capitalist system... no matter what form they may assume, whether of one imperialist

coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing *all* the imperialist powers, are *inevitably* nothing more than a ‘truce’ in periods between wars.” (*Imperialism*, Capital IX)

^{ix} For example Russia strongly opposed the NATO attack on Kosovo, but could do nothing to stop it. After NATO forces attacked Serbia and forced it to accept the occupation of Kosovo, Russia was prepared to accept quasi-independence for the former Serbian province, but was strictly opposed to formal independence fearing an even greater loss of prestige and additional legitimacy for those movements inside Russia which were seeking independence – Chechnya for example.. Its main argument was that it was not permissible to dismember a sovereign country and redraw its borders by force. The US and its allies ignored Russian concerns and when Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, they all immediately recognized it. This was another clear signal to Russia, and all the other imperialists, that the US would do as it pleased regardless of any treaties or agreements and whose interests were being stepped on.

At the time, the NATO countries claimed that they had a “right” to attack Serbia even though it had not attacked them and the UN Security Council had not approved the action, because the Serbian government was committing “genocide” against the Albanian population of Kosovo. While it was true that the Serbs were oppressing the Albanians who made up the vast majority of Kosovo’s population, no mass killings were actually taking place. This was pure war propaganda.

^x France is a founding member of NATO, which was originally based in Paris. In the 1966 de Gaulle sought to increase France’s room to manoeuvre for its own interests – in particular in not wanting to get dragged into nuclear war with the Soviet Union – by withdrawing France’s forces from the unified NATO command structure. NATO headquarters was moved from France to Belgium, but France *remained* a NATO member with full voting rights. After the Soviet Union and its bloc dissolved it re-joined the NATO military structure. While it was forced to go along with the war in Kosovo, France was actually opposed since it meant further strengthening Germany as well as US moves toward a unilateral world order. One example of this was that during this war a French officer was caught supplying the Serbs with the list of targets that NATO had approved for bombing. France claimed he acted on his own, but no serious action was taken against him. Now that the world war with an opposing East European bloc is no longer an immediate danger, France is taking steps which could lead to a re-integration of its forces in the overall NATO command structure in the fairly near future.

^{xi} Following Croatia’s unilateral declaration of its independence from Yugoslavia in June 1991, Germany announced that if the EU did not recognize it, Germany would do so alone. This threat forced the other main EU countries, which had been resisting such a move, to go along with EU recognition of Croatia in January 1992. Germany’s move and the EU recognition that it forced was the spark that ignited a whole series of wars in the Balkans that followed.

^{xii} In practice, all US forces in Afghanistan are commanded by US officers and carry out operations as they see fit. There are no NATO committees that have final say on operations, targets, etc. ISAF – now run by NATO – currently has a total of around 47,000 troops from around 40 countries.

^{xiii} Shortly after the conflict broke out, former Chancellor Schröder described Saakashvili in an interview with “Der Spiegel” as being a “Hasardeur” – which roughly translates into someone who irresponsibly gambles everything on a single bet.

^{xiv} For example, where as after September 11, 2001 Berlusconi of Italy made very loud noises about being the great friend and ally of the US, he has been amazingly quiet on the question of the conflict in the Caucasus. The *International Herald Tribune* reported on August 12th: “‘We cannot create an anti-Russia coalition in Europe, and on this point we are close to Putin’s position,’ the Italian foreign minister, Franco Frattini, told La Stampa in an interview published Monday, stressing that Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was a close ally of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of Russia. Frattini is also European Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security. ‘This war has pushed Georgia further away’ from Europe, Frattini said.”

^{xv} It could be added here, that Germany’s (and the other continental powers’) refusal to go along with the US request to assist in funding the financial system bailout is another very concrete sign of these contradictions. Merkel said publicly that there is no reason for Germany to take such an action. In addition, she criticized the US for not implementing the Basel II agreements on regulating financial markets and institutions. Further, in the last few days the US ambassador to Sweden published an op-ed piece in a Swedish newspaper in which he wrote that it is US policy to prevent the planned Russian-German gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea from ever being completed (Sweden supports this position). The US claims that this pipeline will increase West European “dependency” on energy supplies from Russia. It says that the pipeline should take a land route through the Baltic countries and Poland. Such a route would not lessen any dependency on Russia, but it would allow some countries currently closely aligned with the US to control these supplies. The German government called in the US ambassador in Berlin and demanded a “clarification”. The US said the opinion expressed in the article was a “mistake”. Merkel actually criticized this project during the last election. The press now describes her as a committed supporter of the project.

^{xvi} For example in a recent commentary on the conflict in the Caucasus, Joschka Fischer the former German foreign minister lamented “Europe’s inner conflicts and impotence”, but at the same time called for “building the West’s, and above all

Europe's positions of power" as the "answer to Russia's return to imperialist big power politics". (*Die Zeit*, 18.8.2008) Such statements are a reason why Fischer is in fact NOT a major spokesperson when it comes to Germany's geo-strategic aims.