

Description

From December 2001 the Americans arrived in Kyrgyzstan in force, using the capital Bishkek as a logistics centre to support their invasion of Afghanistan. Washington was also trying to increase its presence in the highly-desired Caspian Sea and Black Sea regions, along with the surrounding areas

further contested between Russia and the Western powers.

Regarding the significance of these territories **Michel Chossudovsky**, a geostrategist and analyst wrote,

“What is at stake is an integrated system of waterways which connects the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea to the Baltic and the Northern Sea Route. In this regard the narrow Kerch Strait in Eastern Crimea is strategic. The 2014 union of Crimea with Russia redefines the geography and the geopolitical chessboard of the Black Sea Basin. Since 2014, the reunion of Crimea to the Russian Federation represented a major setback for US-NATO, whose longstanding objective was to integrate Ukraine into NATO, while extending Western military presence in the Black Sea Basin”.

Moreover, Chossudovsky observed,

“Following the union of Crimea to Russia, The Russian Federation now controls a much larger portion of the Black Sea, which includes the entire coastline of the Crimean peninsula. The Eastern part of Crimea –including the Kerch strait– are under Russia’s jurisdiction. On the Eastern side of the Kerch strait is Russia’s Krasnodar region and extending southwards are the port cities of Novorossiysk and Sochi. Novorossiysk is also strategic. It is Russia’s largest commercial port on the Black Sea, at the cross-roads of major oil and gas pipelines between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea”.

Despite Washington interfering in states like Georgia and the Ukraine, the Americans did not particularly wish to sow instability in the South Caucasus nation of Azerbaijan, another former Soviet republic which borders Georgia to the north. In Azerbaijan the Americans needed a stable environment, because they had interests in oil infrastructure connecting the production fields of Baku, Azerbaijan’s capital, into the deep water Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, in southern Turkey, which could receive tankers each carrying over 300,000 tons of oil.

Baku had furnished Soviet Russia with at least 80% of its entire oil during World War II, without which the heavily mechanised Red Army could probably not have won the war against Nazi Germany. Azerbaijan today still contains considerable quantities of oil, and its strategic importance remains clear. Azerbaijan shares an extensive shoreline with the Caspian Sea, while it is an important energy route linking the Caucasus and Central Asia, as **Zbigniew Brzezinski** had highlighted when he was the US National Security Advisor (1977-81).

Rather than dispatching American soldiers to safeguard Washington’s goals in Azerbaijan, the Pentagon sent mercenaries from private military companies like Blackwater. The aim was to protect the Caspian Sea’s oil and gas deposits, controlled historically by Russia to the largest extent.

The Caspian Sea, the earth’s biggest lake, is extremely rich in natural resources and “is one of the oldest oil-producing areas in the world” and “an increasingly important source of global energy production” according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA). The EIA estimated in 2012 that the Caspian Sea and its environs contain proven oil quantities of 48 billion barrels, more than is present in either America or China. The US Geological Survey has calculated that the Caspian’s real oil reserves are greater than the proven quantities, containing perhaps another 20 billion barrels of undiscovered oil.

In 2012 the Caspian region produced, on average, 2.6 million barrels of crude oil per day, amounting to

about 3.4% of global supply. Much of the oil is extracted near the Caspian shorelines, but further out into its waters are also large amounts of oil. Altogether, the Caspian's oil output is believed to have surpassed that of the North Sea, and exploratory drilling in the latter body of water dropped from 44 wells in 2008 to only 12 in 2014. Yet there are still 16 billion recoverable barrels of oil off the coast of the Scottish city of Aberdeen and west of the Shetland Islands further north.

The US Energy Information Administration estimated that the Caspian Sea contains "probable reserves" of 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The US Geological Survey believes, on top of that, there is another 243 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered gas in the Caspian, most of which is located in the South Caspian Basin. Russia and its neighbour Kazakhstan have controlled the biggest part of the Caspian.

At the Fourth Caspian Summit convened in Astrakhan, Russia, on 29 September 2014, the five nations that share a coast with the Caspian Sea – Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan – decided unanimously they would uphold the security of the region, and prevent it from being penetrated by outside powers. This agreement sought to protect the heart of Eurasia from the expansionist NATO, in effect meaning the US, whose military presence in recent years has been significantly reduced in Central Asia.

The settlement reached, at the Fourth Caspian Summit, closed off the Caspian Sea to president Barack Obama's designs. The US would find it difficult to advance in an area where it previously maintained close relations with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan since the 2001 military attack on Afghanistan, which was supported by NATO countries Germany, Britain, Italy and Canada. The US had distorted the role of NATO to become an offensive military instrument with global reach. Among Washington's ambitions was to secure a permanent presence astride the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges of Central and South Asia, along with the Caucasus.

In May 2005 president Bush had visited the Georgian capital Tbilisi, and he said that Georgia had become a "beacon of liberty". Bush viewed control of the South Caucasus and Central Asia as vital to achieving victory in Afghanistan further east. Bush's White House secured US military bases in Central Asia, such as in southern Uzbekistan, not far from Tajikistan, and Manas Air Base in northern Kyrgyzstan. The strategic objective was not merely to support the "war on terror", but to ensure US control over the region's fossil fuel reserves and pipelines while negating Russian influence.

Washington attempted to position its military power in the heartland of Eurasia, particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, where NATO troops could be sent on to Afghanistan and Iraq. US military bases in Georgia would serve as a back-up for the Pentagon's bases in Turkey, a short distance from Georgia; while a US military presence in Azerbaijan would give the Bush administration the option of launching an attack on Iran, something which has long been discussed in Washington. Most American elites have since realised that a military offensive against Iran would be highly risky and unlikely to succeed. The US Armed Forces failed to overcome Iraq, a much smaller and weaker country than Iran.

The successful 2008 Russian military intervention in Georgia reminded the West that the Caucasus, like the surroundings of the Black Sea and Caspian, is in Russia's sphere of influence. The Kremlin would not allow greater expansion by America. Of all the ex-Soviet republics, Georgia had aligned itself most closely with the US, after the "Rose revolution" in late 2003, which had been supported by the Pentagon and bankrolled by US government-linked groups (NED, Freedom House, etc.) and billionaire Soros' Open Society.

The unsuccessful 2008 Georgian attack on South Ossetia was planned by the US-backed regime of Mikheil Saakashvili – only after the Bush administration had sanctioned military action – according to Georgia's former Ambassador to Russia, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, who provided this testimony to the Georgian parliament. US vice-president Dick Cheney also informed the Georgian leader Saakashvili that "We have your back", in the event of a Russo-Georgian conflict. As it turned out, there was little the Americans could do to prevent a Georgian defeat.

It can be recalled that the Soviet Union had not been beaten militarily by the US. Early this century Russia had 1.2 million troops in its armed forces, and possessed 14,000 nuclear warheads of which 5,192 were operational. The US, on the other hand, possessed 9,962 nuclear warheads in 2006, of which 5,736 were operational, and the US military had 1.3 million active service members. There is not much disparity between these figures.

Russia still possessed more than enough weaponry to compete with America. Political scientist Moniz Bandeira wrote,

"Washington had not heeded the fact that Russia had inherited the huge military firepower of the Soviet Union, and that strategic parity had not come to an end, despite the disintegration of the socialist bloc".

President Bush, as with his predecessor Bill Clinton, needlessly provoked Russia. Shortly after taking office in 2001, Bush withdrew the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) which had been signed in 1972 with the Soviet Union, in order to implement the anti-missile defense system, and thereby reduce the threat of nuclear war.

Bush continued his dangerous moves by establishing missile infrastructure in NATO states Poland and the Czech Republic, and then led NATO to the frontiers of Russia by incorporating the Baltic states into the military organisation in 2004. Bush refused to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1996) along with modifications to the SALT 2 agreement on the reduction of strategic armaments.

However, Russia could not be subdued as Germany has been, because the soil of Russia was never conquered by foreign powers, as German terrain had been from 1945. Unlike Germany too, Russia is a resource-rich state positioned in a pivotal area of Eurasia. Russia has the ability to use its influence, furthermore, to dictate business deals with the European Union relating to important deliveries of oil and gas. The Europeans are much more dependent on the Russians than the other way around.

Russia was growing stronger internally after the upheaval of the 1990s. In 1998 almost 40% of Russians were living below the poverty line; but the number of Russians living in poverty had been reduced to 11% by 2013, a lower figure than in the US where at least 15% of Americans were poverty-stricken in 2014.

Russia has benefited from the high oil and gas prices in the international market, and its industrial growth has risen sharply. Increasing too was Russia's domestic and foreign investment especially in the automobile industry, which rose by 125%, while the country's GDP grew by 70% placing Russia among the world's largest economies.

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