

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

RUSSIA, GEORGIA AND THE US: A NEW COLD WAR?

Russia's military action in the small nation of Georgia has raised the specter of a renewed Cold War between the US and Russia. What does all this mean? In this *Perspective*, I hope to place it in historical perspective and provide some needed analysis to this important development.

- First, some historical background. The year 1989, when the Soviet empire began to collapse, marks an important year in the psyche of Russia, especially for Vladimir Putin. This year, in the words of Bill Keller, “gave birth to a bitter resentment in the humiliated soul of Russia, and no one nursed the grudge so fiercely as Vladimir V. Putin. He watched the empire he had spied for disbanded. He endured the belittling lectures of a rich and self-righteous West. He watched the United States charm away his neighbors, invade his allies in Iraq, and, in his view, play God with the political map of Europe.” To feed this resentment, the new president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, has been preparing for some time now to retake the disputed regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, territories of Georgia. He is decidedly pro-West and has campaigned for membership in NATO. But Putin has made clear that he will not accept NATO's presence in the Caucasus. Historically, there is a bitter relationship between Russia and Georgia, rooted in the complex history of the Caucasus region. Modern Georgian history is one of submission to superior Russian power. For example, in 1783 Georgians formally accepted the protection of Russia against the expanding Persian empire. In 1801, Georgia was annexed by Russia. During the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Georgia became independent once again, siding with the Mensheviks, social democrats more moderate than the radical Bolsheviks of Marx and Lenin persuasion. The Bolsheviks under Lenin signed a treaty with Georgia, recognizing its independence. But Joseph Stalin, a native of Georgia, brutally subdued Georgia. The Georgians, however, never accepted this subjugation, for they preserved their own language, culture, religious practices and sense of national identity. So, when the Soviet empire collapsed, Georgia declared its independence in 1991. In 2003, Eduard Shevardnadze was overthrown in what came to be known as the Rose Revolution and, in 2004, Saakashvili was elected president. As James Traub reports: “Since then, Georgia has become a poster child for Westernization. The growth rate has reached 12 percent. The countryside remains impoverished, but what the outside world sees of Georgia is delightful. Tbilisi is a charming city, its ancient Orthodox churches restored to life, the lanes of the old city lined with cafes and art galleries. Mr. Saakashvili has also made Georgia one of the world's most pro-American countries.” So, Georgia represents a threat to the legitimacy of Russia's authoritarian model of government under Putin. And Georgia's desire to join NATO is frankly unacceptable to Putin. This open hostility between Saakashvili and Putin began in late 2005 and early 2006, when Russia imposed an embargo on Georgia's agricultural products, then on wine and mineral water—virtually Georgia's

entire export market. Putin then cut off all land, sea, air and rail links to Georgia, as well as postal service. Then, in the middle of winter, he cut off natural gas supplies. It is in this context that Abkhazia and South Ossetia become important. Abkhazia is a traditional Black Sea resort area that really defines the western frontier of Georgia. South Ossetia is an impoverished, sparsely populated region that borders on Russia to the north. Historically, both are Georgian. However, each has its own language, culture, history and separatist aspirations. When the Soviet Union collapsed, both sought independence from Georgia and bloody conflicts were fought in 1990-1991 and 1992-1994. Both ended with cease-fires, negotiated by Russia. They in effect became de facto states, which Georgia found intolerable. Therefore, no matter how one looks at this situation, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were sticks of dynamite waiting for a match! When the West recognized the independence of Kosovo from Serbia, a Russian ally, Putin used the same logic against Georgia, declaring that these two provinces should be recognized as independent. As Robert Kagan has commented: “[Putin and his government have the] grand ambition to undo the post-cold war settlement and to re-establish Russia as a dominant power in Eurasia.” For the US and the entire West, the key issue is the survival of democratic states along Russia’s frontier. For Putin, Georgia is a pawn of the West, especially the United States. For Georgia, the West and the United States, Putin is an autocrat seeking to restore the hegemony of Russia in Eurasia. This perception by both sides will no doubt extend to other nations on the border of Russia—and the next US president will undeniably be dealing with an entirely new and more aggressive Russia.

- Second, there is little doubt that the West must tell Putin with the utmost of clarity that his aggression in Georgia is not tolerable and that there will be no redivisions of Europe. Russia has a new and rather powerful leverage—its oil wealth and nuclear arsenal. But it still wants respect, economic deals and membership in the World Trade Organization and a new political and economic cooperation with the European Union. The US and the West must clarify with Putin that until all Russia troops are out of the sovereign nation of Georgia, there can be no business as usual. There will need to be some form of mediation, a greater degree of autonomy for both regions that might be difficult for Georgia to accept and there must be true international peacekeepers in both regions, not Russia troops.
- Third, other nations that border Russia have every right to be afraid of the new, resurgent Russia. Consider the following:
 1. Poland just signed a deal to base American missile interceptors on its territory. But a Russian general declared that Poland might draw Russian retaliation, inferring even nuclear weapons. Does Poland have a reason to fear?
 2. Ukraine has made it clear that it does not want any kind of Russian domination. It has restricted Russian movements in the Black Sea and is prepared to give the West access to its missile-warring systems.
 3. The Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—are gravely concerned about a resurgent Russia. They will not soon forget the totalitarian regime under the Soviet Union that ruled them for decades.

The point is that all of these nations have legitimate reasons to fear what Russia might do to them. Will Russia threaten these independent, sovereign nations that used to be a part of the

Soviet Union? It seems almost unthinkable that Russia would do that, but it is now possible to see Russian tanks in the sovereign nation of Georgia! Robert Kagan poignantly comments that “what the West celebrated as a flowering of democracy [in Georgia, Ukraine and the Baltic states] the autocratic Putin saw as geopolitical and ideological encirclement. Ever since, Putin has been determined to stop, and, if possible, reverse the pro-Western trend on his borders. He seeks not only to prevent Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO but also to bring them under Russian control. Beyond that, he seeks to carve out a zone of influence within NATO, with a lesser security status for countries along Russia’s strategic flanks. That is the primary motive behind Moscow’s opposition to US missile defense programs in Poland and the Czech Republic.”

In conclusion to this *Perspective*, I agree with Kagan’s assessment that August 8, 2008 will be viewed as a turning point in history. “Russia’s attack on sovereign Georgian territory marked an official return of history, indeed to an almost 19th-century style of great-power competition, complete with virulent nationalisms, battles for resources, struggles over spheres of influence and territory, and—even though it shocks our 21st century sensibilities—the use of military power to obtain geopolitical objectives.” These are the harsh realities of the 21st century—and the next US president had better be ready for these realities!

See Robert Kagan in the *Washington Post* (11 August 2008); Jim Hoagland in the *Washington Post* (17 August 2008); Nicholas Kulish and Sara Rhodin in the *New York Times* (17 August 2008); Bill Keller in the *New York Times* (17 August 2008); and James Traub’s very insightful and helpful article in the *New York Times* (10 August 2008).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

THE FALL OF JOHN EDWARDS

The story is not new: A good-looking charismatic leader has an adulterous affair with an attractive woman. John Edwards had an affair with a documentary-movie producer, Rielle Hunter. After months of denial, Edwards finally admitted to his adulterous affair.

There are two especially repugnant dimensions to this affair:

1. Edwards was running for president as a reformer who asked people during the campaign to trust him. He would make a difference and he would change things dramatically as a reformer president. All evidence to the contrary, Edwards lied, covered-up his affair and represents everything that is dishonest, untruthful and personally repugnant. The shame, humiliation and degradation he and his family are now experiencing compounds his fall. What a tragedy!
2. Edwards’s affair with Hunter in 2006 was occurring while his wife was suffering from cancer. Giving every impression of being loyal and supportive of his wife, Edwards was actually violating every dimension of his vows to his wife. His affair was with an advocate of New Age spirituality. Listen to Jonathan Darman’s description of his first encounter with Hunter (Darman is a reporter for *Newsweek* magazine): “She told me her name and asked me what my astrological sign was, which I thought was a little unusual. I told her. She smiled,

and began telling me her life story: how she was working as a documentary-film maker, living with a friend in South Orange, NJ, but how she'd previously had 'many lives.' She'd worked, she said, as an actress and as a spiritual adviser. She was fiercely devoted to astrology and New Age spirituality. She'd been a New York party girl, she'd been married and divorced, she'd been a seeker and a teacher and was a firm believer in the power of truth." Darman relates that in a subsequent conversation, Rielle Hunter declared that her purpose "on this Earth was to help raise awareness about [New Age thinking] to help the unenlightened become better reflections of their true, repressed selves. Her latest project was John Edwards. Edwards, she said, was an old soul who had barely tapped into any of his potential." After she was fired by the Edwards campaign, Darman met Hunter. She blamed the firing on Elizabeth Edwards, the candidate's wife, whom she characterized as "someone who does not give off good energy. She didn't make eye contact with me. . . . Someday the truth about her is going to come out."

After reading Darman's account of his various conversations with Rielle Hunter, I was absolutely shocked by the lack of wisdom and discernment on the part of John Edwards. Hunter is a serious advocate of the New Age worldview, with all its bizarre and weird beliefs. That he had an extended affair with a woman of such convictions tells me more about him than it does about her. Further, that he had an affair with Hunter while his wife was suffering with terminal cancer tells me how hardened his heart truly is. I am most thankful to God that Edwards was not elected Vice President in 2004 and that he did not win the Democratic nomination in 2008. He has no business being a national leader!

Lest I come across as being self-righteous, it is important to remember that John Edwards simply represents how far a human being can go with sin. His depravity and his unbelievable lack of sound judgment are characteristic of the human condition. As we often correctly argue, "there but for the grace of God go I." John Edwards, with his hard, insensitive heart and the shunning of the vows he made to his wife, manifests how far a human being can go in rationalizing sin. Edwards had apparently convinced himself that he could commit adultery with impunity. When I was growing up, my mother used to tell me, "be sure your sins will find you out." God will never ignore human rebellion against His ethical standards. He will either call each one of us to accountability in this age or in the next. Tragically for John Edwards and for his family, that time of accountability is now. Edwards's career as a public figure is over. It will take a very long time for his wife to trust him again and for his children to trust their father's judgment and his promises.

I ask that you pray for John and Elizabeth Edwards and for their children. John Edwards has violated their trust and failed as a role model. But God's grace is sufficient for him and for his family. Pray also for Rielle Hunter. She has bought the lies of the New Age and she gives every appearance of a woman on the path of self-destruction. Pray that God's grace will reach her, for it is only Jesus that will give her the enlightenment that she seeks.

King David said of the slain Saul and his son, Jonathan, "How the mighty have fallen." There is no more appropriate characterization of John Edwards than that epithet.

See Jonathan Darman in *Newsweek* (18/25 August 2008), pp. 42-43.