

COLD WAR II: From the Balkans to Central Asia: U.S.-NATO Prepare for New Cold War

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Though infrequently acknowledged if even given consideration, the current historical period remains what it has been for a quarter century, the post-Cold War era.

Beginning in earnest in 1991 with the near simultaneous disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – instantaneous in the first case, comparatively slower in the second, only complete with the independence of Montenegro in 2008 – the bipolar world ended with the demise of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and the nonaligned one with the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The dissolution of the two nations, the only both multi-ethnic and multi-confessional countries in Europe, was accompanied by violent ethnic conflicts often reinforced by religious differences. In Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, the South Caucasus, the Russian North Caucasus and on the east bank of the Dniester River.

In many instances, in Serbian-majority areas of Croatia and Bosnia and in Transdniestria, memories of World War II gave rise to legitimate fears of revanchism among populations that recalled the death camps and pogroms of Adolf Hitler's allies in the early 1940s and witnessed the recrudescence of the ideologies, the irredentism and the political trappings that gave rise to them.

Transdniestria refused to become part of post-Soviet Moldova as it foresaw both states being reabsorbed into Romania. Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adjara, parts of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, didn't desire to be included in the Republic of Georgia and majority-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh adopted a similar approach to post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The above are collectively known in certain circles as the frozen conflicts in former Soviet space.

The centrifugal dynamic reached more dangerous proportions when armed secessionist movements went beyond federal republics – the Leninist constitutions of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia formally allowed for their independence under the proper conditions – and arose in autonomous and former autonomous republics: Chechnya and Dagestan in Russia and Kosovo and the Presevo Valley in Serbia. Northwestern Macedonia was the site of the same destabilization in 2001, the direct – and inevitable – result of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's air war against Yugoslavia two years earlier on behalf of Kosovo separatists.

The area collectively assailed by the above violence and national vivisection stretches from the Adriatic Sea to the Caspian Sea, north of the Broader (or Greater or New) Middle East which in turn begins in Mauritania and ends in Kazakhstan, from Africa's Atlantic coast to China's western border.

The ever more extensive breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, correlated with – and more than correlated with – the development of NATO as an expansionist, aggressive and bellicose regional and global military force.

Twenty-one nations and five smaller breakaway states (including Kosovo) where earlier there had been only two created that many more opportunities for the West to expand southward and eastward from Cold War-era NATO territory. Every one of the 21 former Soviet and Yugoslav federal republics is now either a full member of NATO or engaged in a partnership program. Thirteen of them have troops serving under NATO command in Afghanistan.

Two recent announcements demonstrate the constantly increasing penetration and domination of the area that begins in Slovenia and ends in Azerbaijan, a swathe of land that on its eastern extreme borders Russia to its north and Iran to its south.

Recently NATO's Allied Command Operations website announced the resumption of what had been annual military exercises employed to integrate partners in the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.

The dual exercise, Cooperative Longbow and Cooperative Lancer, respectively a command and a field exercise, will occur this year in Macedonia from May 21-29 with the participation of several NATO members – if the preceding versions are an indication, the U.S. Britain, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Turkey and others – and perhaps twice as many partnership adjuncts from the Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative programs. The exercise, like its predecessors, is based on a “crisis response” scenario and a United Nations mandate. Like Libya last year, for instance.

In the last Cooperative Longbow/Cooperative Lancer exercises, in Georgia in 2009, NATO members the U.S., Britain, Canada, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Albania participated. Longbow/Lancer 2009 was held less than eight months after the five-day war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 and was also to have included NATO members Estonia and Latvia and twelve partnership nations.

This year's version is slated to involve the largest number of Partnership for Peace states in any Longbow/Lancer exercises, thirteen: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine. NATO hasn't yet disclosed which Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners will participate this year.

The first Longbow/Lancer exercises were held in Moldova in 2006 with seven NATO members, twelve Partnership for Peace nations (all of the above-mentioned except for Serbia, which joined the Partnership for Peace in that year) and Mediterranean Dialogue partner Israel. Mediterranean Dialogue member Morocco and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative members Qatar and the United Arab Emirates sent observers.

Cooperative Longbow/Lancer 2007 was conducted in Albania and the following year's exercise in Armenia. All five nations – Moldova, Albania, Armenia, Georgia and Macedonia – are deeply involved, either on their own territory or in neighboring nations, in one or more of the conflicts discussed above. In 2009 Armenia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Serbia withdrew beforehand because of the Georgia-Russian war of a few months earlier and Estonia and

Latvia did also because of an anti-government mutiny staged the day before the almost month-long exercise began.

What role the NATO and partnership troops may have played had the military uprising progressed further than it did can be easily imagined.

The U.S. Marine Corps' Black Sea Rotational Force posted on its Facebook account (and to date nowhere else) that its six-month rotation for this year will "build enduring partnerships with 19 nations throughout Eastern Europe." More accurately, as the Marine program formed two years ago identifies as its mission, in "the Black Sea, Balkan and Caucasus regions."

Two years ago twelve nations were involved, by last year there were thirteen - Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine - and this year nineteen. The six new participating nations were not named.

Black Sea Rotational Force 2012 began its half-year-long deployment in Georgia by joining Agile Spirit 2012 in March at the Vaziani Training Area where the last Cooperative Longbow/Lancer exercises took place. Serbia may host its first military exercises with the force as well.

The U.S. Marine Corps is not only building bilateral and multilateral ties with nineteen countries in the Balkans, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus and other parts of the former Soviet Union, it is also consolidating NATO's expansion into those areas with the ultimate aim of full Alliance membership for those not already among the bloc's 28 member states.

It can be argued that the Cold War didn't end, that the U.S. and NATO continue to wage it with wars and preparations for wars.

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