

The Winners Are Grinners: US Uses Afghan War To Besiege Russia At Ferocious Pace

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Americans Got What They Wanted from the United States-Russia Summit, but Is This Victory a Pyrrhic One?

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-Under Obama, the U.S. military presence on Russia's Central Asian flank is proceeding at a ferocious pace. The appointment of Richard Holbrooke, the former NATO Ambassador who orchestrated NATO's attack on Yugoslavia as envoy to the region is indicative of Obama's intentions. No area is more strategically important than the "Af-Pak" project, which positions U.S. troops within the zone fronting on Iran, China, and Russia's Central Asia.

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-In spite of the myth that Obama represents a positive new environment, he has kept all the aggressive initiatives launched by Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, including NATO expansion, the NATO military exercises in Georgia, the agreement to place Patriot missiles in Poland and military enhancement in the Baltic States. He refused to forego the ballistic missile defense and radar systems in Poland and the Czech Republic.

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Upon my return from Moscow I found that the U.S. consensus in regard to the outcome of the United States - Russia summit (except for some mild criticism from the Republican rightwing and Democratic human rights activists) was of a mutually beneficial accord. But the actual results of the recent summit games are now beginning to emerge from the fog of polite rhetoric and the aura of "success."

In the United States it appears that the American team walked off the field with all the trophies, having yielded no points to its Russian opponents. However, it is not at all clear whether Russia's concessions, which encourage U.S. adventurism, are in the long-term interest of either the United States or Russia.

Barack Obama's trip actually carried two messages, with the second delivered by Vice President Joe Biden during his trip to Georgia and the Ukraine immediately after the summit. Obama sought Russian cooperation for America's military buildup in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the NGO buildup inside Russia itself. Biden's message contained a series of aggressive denunciations of Russia's foreign, social and economic policies, and, with backing from Hillary Clinton's State Department spokesman Philip Crowley, made it clear that the United States would continue to support Georgia's and Ukraine's integration into NATO.

Soon Hillary Clinton, backed up by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, increased the pressure on Russia by demanding that Iran surrender its legal right for a civilian nuclear fuel cycle, indicating that the United States would demand dramatic new sanctions against Iran – inevitably putting additional pressure on Russia to be more aggressive against its neighbor and ally in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The U.S. strategy at the summit was to first try to split the Russians into Dmitry Medvedev versus Vladimir Putin camps and then take the offensive on all fronts. A week before the meeting, Obama denounced Putin by linking him to the Cold War and sending a message that Russians should rally around the presumably more liberal Medvedev.

The United States then developed a clever plan to frame the summit as a cooperative success and distract observers by placing the discussions about the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in the spotlight. With most attention focused on the “success” of the unsubstantial agreement to reduce several hundred redundant missiles and warheads, the United States was free to achieve strategic goals.

On the “hard power” military front, the United States gave up nothing and achieved three strategic concessions on behalf of the Russians: cooperation in the consolidation of U.S. military presence in Russia's southern military zone in Afghanistan and Pakistan; agreement on 4,500 U.S. military flights across Russia to supply the Afghanistan-Pakistan operations; and Russia-NATO military cooperation.

Under Obama, the U.S. military presence on Russia's Central Asian flank is proceeding at a ferocious pace. The appointment of Richard Holbrooke, the former NATO Ambassador who orchestrated NATO's attack on Yugoslavia as envoy to the region is indicative of Obama's intentions. No area is more strategically important than the “Af-Pak” project, which positions U.S. troops within the zone fronting on Iran, China, and Russia's Central Asia.

The importance of the over flights should be lost on no one. Russian military analysts who dismiss it because there are “no strategic targets in the area” miss the point. With the announcement by Gates on December 1, 2008 that he will elevate “irregular warfare” to the level of “conventional warfare” the U.S. administration declared a dramatic upgrade in its infiltration, destabilization, and proxy-war capacity. For the new American irregular warfare approach, it is the ability to map small terrain, analyze civilian traffic patterns and read local radar systems that will be key to the next round of U.S. operations across Russia's southern flank, from the Crimea to Kyrgyzstan.

America's growing activity and outreach to new “moderate” (i.e. collaborationist) Taliban, nationalist, and other movements will inevitably be linked to a broader pattern of anti-Russian activity by local nationalist and Islamic movements, and for this the intelligence

gained from over-flights will be invaluable. That Russia reserves the right to inspect any plane is irrelevant – any important “contraband” going into Af-Pak can easily be flown in from Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan or via southern routes.

An impressive array of operatives and material are already moving into the area through a variety of channels and under a variety of covers. For example, according to news reports, on July 14 six Ukrainian contractors were killed in Afghanistan’s combative Helmand province. They were in a helicopter operated by a Moldovan company hired by NATO’s International Security Assistance Force, under contract to supply British troops. They were initially reported to be “civilian contractors on a humanitarian mission.”

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On the “soft power” front, the United States got Russian cooperation to develop an important NGO capacity in Moscow operating under the cover of “Civil Society.” This was accomplished through the Civil Society Summit event, organized by institutions and individuals long associated with the “color revolution” strategies. A key organization which participated in the summit is the Moscow-based “New Eurasia Foundation” (NEF), established in 2004 by the Eurasia Foundation and George Soros’s Open Society Institute (OSI). NEF was launched with support from George Soros and the U.S. State Department, which organized a \$25 million grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

“Soft power” support for civil society structures should not be confused with “weak power.” In fact it was through the soft power (the so-called color revolutions, in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan) that brought significant countries formerly allied with Russia into alignment with NATO. The resulting regional instability has not been beneficial to either American or Russian long-term interests. The future of these hard and soft power projects is unclear, but they will certainly color the U.S.-Russian relations for years to come.

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