

THREATENING RUSSIA AND IRAN? Clinton Pledges Increased Military Assistance to Georgia for New Conflicts

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In the middle of her three-nation tour of the South Caucasus, on June 5 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with fellow short-term New Yorker Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia. The latter is a premiere, a greatly favored, a nonpareil American satrap, for whom the doors of the White House and the op-ed pages of the major U.S. dailies are always open. For eight and a half years he has been president of his nation after winning 96 percent of the vote on January 6, 2004 in a spurious election following standing head of state Eduard Shevardnadze being manhandled and deposed in the so-called Rose Revolution of the preceding November. The sort of election the State Department is always willing to endorse if the result advances American geostrategic interests.

Clinton was in the country both to meet with Saakashvili and to attend the third annual plenary session of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission, which was created five months after the five-day war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008.

During a joint press conference in Batumi, the capital of Adjara, subjugated by the Saakashvili regime shortly after it came to power, the Georgian head of state greeted Clinton with these words:

“Madam Secretary, I will speak in English. They have heard me already speak in Georgian many times.” Columbia University graduate Saakashvili and former carpetbagging senator from New York Clinton speak a common language in more than one sense.

Never one to shy away from fawning on his American financial and military sponsors, from George W. Bush and Barack Obama to Condoleezza Rice and the current secretary of state, the erratic Georgian strongman laid on his characteristic cloying praise particularly thick in regard to last month’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit in the town Clinton was born in:

“I want to thank you, Madam Secretary, for your Administration’s leadership and your personal leadership of the decided question of our integration into Euro-Atlantic alliance. The last summit in Chicago was an important step forward toward that process for Georgia. The language of the communiqué, the meeting of the 28 allies with the four aspirant countries that put Georgia in the same group as the three Balkan states, and the words you pronounced during the meetings on enlargement perspectives and talking to them at length about Georgia’s continued reform and progress and success showed to everybody that Georgia was closer than ever to fulfill its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. ”

In the earlier meeting of the Strategic Partnership Commission, Clinton was accompanied by Joseph McMillan, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, in which capacity he is described by the Pentagon as “oversee[ing] the formulation, coordination, and implementation of strategy and policy involving Africa, Europe and NATO, the Middle East, and most of the former Soviet Union.” The two met with a Georgian contingent headed by Defence Minister Bacho Akhalaia.

During the event with Saakashvili, Clinton thanked the American client regime for committing 1,700 troops to NATO’s ten-and-half- year armed conflict in Afghanistan. Georgian troop strength will increase notwithstanding claims that NATO is “drawing down” forces from the war-plagued South Asian nation. In Clinton’s words, “Georgia is already the largest per capita contributor of troops to our efforts in Afghanistan, and we thank you for sending a second battalion which will make you the largest non-NATO contributor. “

She also pledged U.S. support for several new military assistance initiatives, including training and material aid for Georgia’s armed forces “to better monitor your coasts and your skies”, upgrading its helicopter fleet and “helping Georgia give its officers the 21st century training they need for today’s changing missions.”

With increased assistance from the Pentagon, Clinton added, “Georgia will be a stronger international partner with an improved capacity for self-defense. “

“Self-defense” is a reference to Russia, which will defend South Ossetia and Abkhazia against any new acts of aggression perpetrated by Georgia.

To make the above point patently unambiguous, America’s top diplomat regurgitated claims that Russia is “occupying” the two new nations and reiterated the U.S. demand that Russian troops leave Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where they were reinforced after Georgia’s invasion of South Ossetia four years ago, affirming that “the United States remains steadfast in our commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.”



Fielding questions from the local media, Clinton was even more explicit:

“As we stated at the Chicago NATO summit, the United States and all NATO allies support

Georgia's aspirations for NATO membership, and we reaffirmed the Bucharest decision and all subsequent decisions. We continue to work closely with Georgia both bilaterally and through the NATO-Georgia Commission to support the goals that Georgia has set for itself in its annual national program. And we remain committed to supporting Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The NATO-Georgia Commission is an initiative established the month after the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 and the Annual National Program was launched two months later under its auspices to promote Georgia's full integration into NATO by circumventing the traditional Membership Action Plan.

Russia was not long in reacting to Clinton's pronouncements.

The following day Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich accused the U.S. of "fueling the revanchist aspirations of Tbilisi," demonstrating that Washington had "failed to learn lessons from the August, 2008 events in the Caucasus."

In regard to Clinton's announcement that the U.S. was stepping up training of the Georgian military, the U.S. Marines Corps has been training the country's armed forces since 2003. Two months ago 300 U.S. Marines were in Georgia to lead the two-week Agile Spirit 2012 military exercise. In July of 2008 1,000 U.S. Marines led the Immediate Response 2008 exercise in Georgia, which ended on July 31, a week before Georgia's invasion of South Ossetia. American troops and equipment remained in Georgia during the ensuing war with Russia and U.S. military aircraft flew 2,000 Georgian troops back from Iraq to join the hostilities.

In reference to the above, the Russian Foreign Ministry statement added:

"It was the active encouragement from the U.S. and other Western states, commitments about accepting Georgia into NATO and the massive supply of armaments from abroad that formed a sense of all-permissiveness and impunity for Mikheil Saakashvili, which pushed him to commit a criminal adventure in South Ossetia. At the time we had to bring the aggressor to his senses.

"There is a sense of deja vu today. High-ranking U.S. officials are again making loud statements about supporting Saakashvili, repeating verbatim false theses of his propaganda about 'Russian occupation of Georgia'."

The day after Clinton's departure from Georgia, Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia Batu Kutelia said that the decision to expand military cooperation between the U.S. and his nation was reached at the one-on-one meeting of presidents Obama and Saakashvili in the Oval Office of the White House in January of this year.

Emphasizing that Pentagon experts and advisers were involved in what he listed, Kutelia said:

"The main objective is to modernize the armed forces up to modern standards so that they can cope with the challenges we face. Defenses on the principles of territorial defense will be developed with the help of the U.S. side. Clinton noted several components. First of all, air and sea control, which is one of the main challenges for us, the war with Russia in 2008 clearly demonstrated it. Modernization of the fleet of helicopters is also important, because it will increase the mobility of our armed forces and will be one of the most important

elements in ensuring the principle of territorial defense. The preparation of our officers and the armed forces to the standards of the 21st century was also noted, and she mentioned this particular phrase.”

On the same day Deputy Defense Minister Nodar Kharshiladze told journalists that “The U.S. will provide assistance to Georgia to improve [its] defense capability, which implies such areas as control of air space, development of helicopter flight capacity, development of engineering capabilities and training of Georgian units to conduct defensive operations.”

The Georgian – and American – definition of defense has already been commented upon and is evidenced by the war against South Ossetia and the deployment of U.S. Marines Corps-trained Georgian troops to Iraq and Afghanistan.

In recent months speculation has been rife, including a statement to the effect by former Georgian president Shevardnadze, that Washington intends to employ military assets in Georgia for an attack against Iran. Adding to the Saakashvili regime’s arsenal and emboldening the reckless American client with carte blanche backing will threaten peace even beyond the Caucasus.

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