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The conflict in South Ossetia will not be solved until we all see the broader picture. The recent conflict in Georgia is only partly about the separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The wider, if not the immediate, cause of the conflict was the invitation by NATO, during its Bucharest summit in February, to Georgia to become a member of an organization that proclaims Russia its threat. The decision by the USA to deploy Missile Defence facilities in Poland and Czech Republic emphasised the point. The Russian leadership saw this as a definitive plan by the USA, through NATO, to surround their country by building a ring around them. The August 7th military attacks by Georgia on the breakaway region of South Ossetia were the last straw for Russia.

It is clear that Georgia would not have planned and launched these attacks without consent from the US. American opinion is too important for Georgia in matters of NATO membership. In addition, it is not a secret that the Georgian military has for a long time been armed and trained by the USA. These developments make the USA active collaborators, not only in planning, but also in launching the provocatively named "Operation Clear Field", which took place on 7th August.

Granted, under international law, Russia did not have a right to intervene militarily in the territory of a sovereign state. But Russia had to intervene because "Operation Clear Field" in South Ossetia had led to the deaths of over 2000 innocent and defenceless men, women and children; destroyed numberless residential and commercial properties and driven thousands of refugees into Russia. Russia did not choose to intervene : it considers it had no choice.

It appears to some that the motive behind "Operation Clear Field" was to justify the deployment of USA anti-nuclear missile shield in Europe. To achieve that objective, the USA had to take three simultaneously steps which provoked Russia into presenting itself as an aggressive state: (1) the USA invited Georgia to join NATO and promised the defence guarantees that go with its membership; (2) the USA trained and armed the Georgian army; and (3) the USA encouraged Mr. Saakashvili to attack South Ossetia and Abkhazia (according to close observers of "Operation Clear Field", Abkhazia was supposed to be attacked by the Georgian army after South Ossetia).

Did the USA pre-plan a strategy to provoke Russia? The USA signed a deal with Poland not only to start the installation of Missile Defence facilities, but also to supply Poland with missiles. This development forced Russia to declare that Poland would become a legitimate target in any nuclear confrontation with the USA; thus further damaging the already deteriorated relations between Russia and the USA.

In summary, it is becoming increasingly clear that, as it was during the last Cold War, we are

reaching yet another deadlock in the east-west relations. Instead of applying the lessons learnt from the Cold War to resolve problems through diplomatic means, the West is repeating the same mistakes again and again by opting for military confrontation. Not much can be done now, especially after American-Polish defence deal.

However, it is not too late for the European countries, which have more to lose than the USA, to pull us from this deadlock.

They can do this by persuading the USA not to go ahead with the plan to deploy the Missile Defence shield in Poland and the Czech Republic; and by reconsidering the invitation to Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO.