
LTP : Russia Saved the People of South Ossetia from Genocide

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Mr. President, it seems that the latest war between Russia and Georgia was not seriously evaluated by the Armenian authorities, political parties, and experts even though that war has directly affected our vital interests.

I cannot disagree with your observation but I would like to make one clarification. The war was initially Georgian-Ossetian, and only later it became Georgian-Russian.

Do you mean to say that Georgia was the initiator and Russia was drawn into the conflict reluctantly?

I do not mean to say anything. I am only stating the facts. Nobody can dispute the fact that it was Georgia that unleashed the war, aiming to do away with the South Ossetian Republic by force. Nobody can dispute also that Russia with its decisive intervention saved the people of South Ossetia from Genocide. If the Russian intervention was delayed by six hours, there would be no South Ossetia today.

Many have criticized the Russian intervention on the grounds that it was disproportionate even if they have not disputed its necessity.

I do not know a single case in history when great powers have responded proportionately after their interests have been infringed upon. As I said, the important thing is that Russia, regardless of the proportionality of its response, saved the people of South Ossetia from an imminent Genocide.

What do you think about the claims that Sahakashvili could not have started the war without the approval of the United States?

I consider such claims baseless and less than credible, because I think it is impossible for a serious country like the United States to prod anybody toward such recklessness. President Sahakashvili may have simply misjudged or misinterpreted certain friendly gestures from the west.

In that case what was Sahakashvili's calculus based on? Is it possible that he had not foreseen the consequences of his actions and particularly the Russian reaction?

I think the Georgian government's calculus was first and foremost predicated upon the element of surprise, and secondly, the unjustified expectation of receiving support from the international community by presenting countries friendly to Georgia with a fait accompli. Thus we are dealing with a typical, as well as an instructive, case of wishful thinking.

If, as you mentioned, Georgia had bet on the surprise factor, why did they not try to send paratroopers to block the Roki tunnel in order to thwart the advance of Russian troops?

The Georgian intention was not the physical extermination of the South Ossetian people, but its deportation, which could have become impossible if the tunnel was not kept open. Sahakashvili could not have failed to realize that an extermination campaign would not have been forgiven by the international community, whereas deportation could have been somehow

tolerated, as it was in the case of Krajina's Serbs in 1995.

Could you briefly summarize the consequences of this war?

The war unleashed by Georgia has inflicted heavy losses on the people of South Ossetia and on Russian peacekeepers, but the main victim of this war is Georgia, which, in addition to the loss of thousands of lives, lost the Georgian-populated enclaves and now has tens of thousands of new refugees. I have no doubt that none other than the Georgian people will demand an account from its government for all of that. I feel personally pained for the national catastrophe that has befallen the Georgian people, and I wish them a speedy recovery of its dignity and self confidence. That wish is as sincere humanly as it is unequivocal politically, since the stability, strength, and prosperity of Georgia is in Armenia's best interest.

How would you evaluate the mediation mission of president Sarkozy aimed at settling the Russian-Georgian conflict?

It was a very timely and effective mission which, of course, was facilitated by the Russian side's flexibility and the Georgian side's absence of alternatives. Sarkozy's role was made more important by the fact that he was representing not only the position of France but also that of the European Union.

And how would you comment on the unequivocal support the leaders of Poland, Baltic republics, as well as Ukraine lent to Georgia in that context?

The demonstration of solidarity that took place in Tbilisi was, of course, a moving scene, but its meaning was moral rather than political.

What consequences can the Russian `Georgian armed confrontation have from the prospective of global politics?

In spite the wide international resonance generated by the Russian-Georgian war, it is obvious that it is going to have an only local or regional importance, and is not going to affect the relations of the superpowers in matters of strategic importance. The tough anti-Russian rhetoric in the Unites States should be seen in the context of the presidential campaign, therefore there are no grounds to see this as a long-term development. South Ossetia is not the kind of focal point that could trigger the resumption of a new cold war.

Could the Georgian-Ossetian war affect in any way the other unsolved ethnic conflicts?

Undoubtedly. Unfortunately though not in the direction of facilitating their resolution, but rather in the direction of complicating and prolonging them. The war once again has brought to the surface the internally inconsistent positions the superpowers have adopted toward the two fundamental principles of international law ` the principle of territorial integrity and the principle of national self-determination. Unless the world rejects the practice of applying double standards in this question and unless the world finds the key to harmonizing these principles, it is impossible to imagine a speedy resolution to ethno-national conflicts.

What kind of effect has the war had on Armenia?

The war demonstrated in all clarity how fragile and vulnerable Armenia's economy is. The war in the neighboring state that lasted only a few days immediately disrupted the regularity of shipments to Armenia and created a certain level of panic in our internal market, particularly in the area of

natural gas and gasoline supply. Even a temporary disruption of the operation of the port of Poti and the destruction of one of the bridges of the Transcaucasian railway are likely to make the situation more complicated still. This should force the Armenian authorities to think very carefully about this bitter reality and draw appropriate conclusions.

How do you think the Armenian government should have reacted to the war and what steps should it have taken under the circumstances?

If you are talking about the official or diplomatic reaction, then positive neutrality was probably the maximally reasonable position the Armenian government could have adopted toward the armed conflict between two friendly states. In this regard, there are few reasons to complain about the position of the Armenian authorities. In practice, the Armenian government must take, and it has partially taken, certain steps with regard to the provision of humanitarian assistance to both Ossetian and Georgian sides, organization of the shipment of goods with truck convoys, participation in the work of repairing the port of Poti and the Caspi railway bridge, etc. But this is not all I mean by 'appropriate conclusions.' I mean something much more substantial, more specifically, the lessons we should learn from this war.

What lessons do you have in mind?

First, the Armenian authorities must realize what a disaster Armenia's blockade and its unilateral dependence on only one neighbor are. That realization should force them to take real steps toward the resolution of the Karabagh conflict and the normalization of Armenian `Turkish relations. Second, imprudence is particularly dangerous for small states because its consequence for them is usually national catastrophe. Small states cannot afford such mistakes. Only the powerful can afford such luxury, because their mistakes are costly not for themselves, but again for the small states. And third, small states should once and for all reject the policy of relying on third parties and should try instead to solve their problems relying on their own means and capabilities, remaining committed to the accepted norms of international law and the norm of peaceful coexistence of nations.

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