

---

# Caucasus : If Russia Acted Differently And Future Possibilities

BY Michael Averko  
American Chronicle - 21/8/2008

---

A series of destabilizing responses were likely if Russia did not counterattack against the August 7 Georgian government strike into South Ossetia. Russia would have probably faced a significantly greater refugee crisis from what occurred. Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili might have had greater inclination to attack Abkhazia. Many Russians would be pressing the issue of why their government did not take action to deter the hypothetically stated situation.

These points relate to why Russia acted in the way it did. In doing so, the Kremlin no doubt considered the rhetorical backlash it would receive.

The Russian government was in a kind of "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario. They knew that a reasonably based (as far as major powers conducting armed action) counterattack against the Georgian government was not going to be met with open arms from Western neo-liberals and neo-conservatives. On the other hand, a Russian non-military response would probably not result in significant benefits for Russia. On the contrary, some in the West would gloat about how their guy Saakashvili had his way with "Russian surrogates" and Russia.

Russian foreign policy takes into account the Western post-Soviet global advocacy that favors certain humanitarian issues over others. Western laxness to the 1995 ethnic cleansing of 150,000 Krajina Serbs and willingness to downplay Kosovo Liberation Army transgressions lead Moscow to believe that the West would not be so scornful of a "disproportionate" Georgian government attempt which victoriously retook South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In 1992, Russia assumed the role of peacekeeper in the disputed South Ossetian and Abkhaz territories of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). As the strongest force in the Caucasus, the Russians were on better terms with the involved adversaries than the belligerents were with themselves.

Comparative references are made to the Russian counterattack on Georgia and the 2003 American led attack on Iraq. Of course, Saakashvili is nowhere near the threat that Saddam Hussein posed. At the same time, the territory of the former Georgian SSR borders Russia, whereas Iraq is not even in the same hemisphere as the United States. In 1991, there was an international consensus for turning back Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. This included Syria and Turkey; two countries not known for seeing eye to eye. In 2003, Syria, Turkey and other nations expressed apprehension to the American led attack which overthrew Saddam. For now, it appears that the suffering caused by the Russian military action in Georgia will be considerably lower than what Iraq has experienced since 2003.

Georgia's best chance at successfully achieving a mutually agreed to jurisdiction in South Ossetia and Abkhazia involve factors that some will not find appealing. The least provocative factor grants the two regions great autonomy. The other facet concerns Georgia and Russia redeveloping closer ties. South Ossetia and Georgia are not currently motivated to be a part of Georgia. Russia presently sees little reason to please Georgian desires in the two disputed territories.

Attention has been given to Abkhazia's ethnic makeup prior to the Soviet breakup (17.8% Abkhaz and 45.7% Georgian, as per the 1989 Soviet census). The roughly 35% non-ethnic Abkhaz/Georgian population took different positions on the Abkhaz-Georgian dispute. Many fled post-Soviet war torn Abkhazia, with a good number remaining (according to a 2003 census of Abkhazia, 43.8% of the population is Abkhaz and 21.3% Georgian). The Abkhaz note that they were said to be a majority in their region going back to about the mid-19th century (based on not always accurate census taking). During the Stalin era, the Abkhaz felt discriminated against when compared to the Georgians.

Abkhazia's situation reveals how disputed territories have different circumstances. Among the comparative specifics being history and human rights, in conjunction with the overall will of the people from the respective disputed territory. The disputed former Communist bloc territories are Kosovo, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Trans-Dniester.

<http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/71911>

---