

---

# Return Of Legal Boomerang

By David Petrosian, political correspondent of Noyan Tapan center.  
Noyan Tapan - 15/8/2008

---

"On August 8 Georgian military sub-units began, as official representatives stated, "establishing constitutional order" in the territory of its former insurgent autonomy, currently - the Republic of South Ossetia unrecognized by the international community. A number of sources claim this armed operation was allegedly provoked by the Ossetian side. However, we have not yet found any confirmation of this circumstance by independent sources.

The Georgian army, which at the moment of starting the military operation had a considerable superiority over the Russian peacekeepers and the military units of South Ossetia both in terms of their number and heavy armement, at the first stage of operations managed to take, without much difficulty, control of most of the dominant heights over Ossetia's capital of Tskhinval/Tskhinvali and launched an attack on the city where half the population of that unrecognized republic lives. The onslaught on the city was accompanied by the massive use of large-calibre artillery, "Grad" ("Hail") units and tanks. Meanwhile, the Georgian army rushed to the Roki tunnel in order to gain control of the tunnel linking Russia and South Ossetia. To all appearances, the blitzkrieg envisaged restoring Tbilisi's power over South Ossetia through "enthronement" of the government of Ossetian collaborationist Dmitry Sanakoyev.

However, Georgian troops stuck in street battles in Tskhinval with a Russian peacekeeping battalion and Ossetian regular and irregular sub-units that offered fierce resistance. The Georgian army also failed to reach the intended boundary lines in the area of the Roki tunnel.

In response to the actions of the Georgian side, Russia sent motorized units, tanks and aircraft to help its peacekeepers in South Ossetia. At the same time Russia reinforced its peacekeeping contingent in Abkhazia and brought the maritime boundaries of this republic (unrecognized by the international community) under control. The flagship of Russian Black Sea Navy - "Moscow" rocket cruiser arrived from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk.

During several days Russian troops forced Georgian sub-units from South Ossetia and established full control of the zone of peacekeepers' responsibility. They also hit the whole military infrastructure of Georgia within the framework of the operation on "enforcement of peace". On August 12 the operation was completed, and on August 13 Russia began withdrawing its troops from Zugdidi and Gori, two Georgian cities at the front.

It is also noteworthy that performing their duty as an ally of Ossetians, the sub-units of Abkhazian armed forces succeeded in distracting part of the Georgian army and carried out a successful special operation of driving Georgian troops out of Abkhazia's Kodori gorge which Georgian sub-units entered in 2006 in violation of the 1994 Moscow Agreements.

Like in the previous years of intensification of Georgian-South Ossetian confrontation (1990-1992 and 2004), it was the civilian population of South Ossetia that suffered the greatest losses as a result of hostilities: by unspecified data, more than 1,600 were left dead, while the number of Ossetian refugees from the conflict zone exceeded 30 thousand. 74 Russian servicemen, including about 15 peacekeepers, were killed. By some expert estimates, the Georgian side's losses made 170-180 people. The number of South Ossetian troops killed is being specified.

The United Nations Security Council held discussions on a resolution presented by France. To all appearances, the principles, which were agreed on during a meeting of French President Nicolas Sarkozy with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow, will form a basis for the resolution.

We will try to sum up the above mentioned developments:

- we can assess the actions of official Tbilisi and president Mikhail Saakashvili as insufficiently considered and badly calculated which have put Georgia in a very difficult position. The matter concerns not only its undermined military infrastructure and irrecoverable losses but also the fact that in essence, all the achievements in the country's sociopolitical and economic life gained thanks to the 2003 "revolution of roses" are now in question. The Georgian residents who lived in the zone of the conflicts had to leave their homes. Anti-Georgian moods in North Caucasus have reached quite a high level.

- the unreasoned force operation of Tbilisi resulted in the fact that Georgia questioned its ability to settle its conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia without methods involving force,

- given the existence of the Kosovo precedent, South Ossetia and Abkhazia took a significant step to realization of their plans of secession from Tbilisi,

- many today ask themselves the question about whether Mikhail Saakashvili's actions were sanctioned by Washington or not. Strange as it may seem, in both cases this can be seen as failure of the U.S. policy in the South Caucasus. If Americans sanctioned M. Saakashvili's actions, it turns out that they were mistaken in their military and political forecasts, while on the other hand they did not give the appropriate support to their ally. If the action was not sanctioned by Washington, it turns out that M.

Saakashvili has involved the Bush administration in an extremely dangerous adventure and questioned some important positions of the U.S. in the region.

How expedient is it to deal with such a hardly predictable leader?

- the readiness of numerous volunteers from North Caucasus to take part in military operations against Georgia on the side of Abkhazia and South Ossetia showed once again that North and South Caucasus are two parts of one geopolitical system. Thus, any political planning in the region of Greater Caucasus is doomed to fail when it does not take this circumstance into consideration,

- as a result of its strict response actions against Georgia, Russia has considerably strengthened its positions in North Caucasus - at the time these positions were undermined by two wars in Chechnya. Moreover, Russia's rating has risen not only in the Russian regions of the South Federal Okrug but also in such regions as Adygei, Karachai-Cherkess, Kabardino-Balkaria, and certainly North Ossetia. Besides, the demonstration of Moscow's force capacities in its confrontation with Georgia became a convincing argument for radicals in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. We do not state that these actions have resulted in final liquidation of the danger of separatism in North Caucasus but it is definite that the number of its supporters will not grow in the foreseeable future,

- Russia's use and demonstration of force will make Baku consider everything seriously before taking a decision on solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem by force,

- the "problemness" of Georgia may slow down the development of projects on realization of hydrocarbon raw material supply routes from Central Asia to the West via the South Caucasus by bypassing Russia. This in its turn means tendencies of strengthening positions of Russia in Central Asia. Baku and Central Asian countries will think over South Caucasian routes for supply of power-bearing substances and the possible actions of Moscow in a crisis situation,

- in the foreseeable future the U.S. can hardly use bridgeheads in the South Caucasus for military operations against Iran,

At the moment Russia is being accused of violating a number of rules of international law. There may be some grounds for it but the fact remains that it is Georgia and not Russia that began the military operation and that Tbilisi acted in violation of the 1992 Dagomys Agreements.

On the other hand, what can be done about the precedents of violation of international law in former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Kosovo which were set at the time by the U.S, West and the same NATO? At the time they did much so that the right of force rather than the force of law could triumph in a number of conflicts. Now the legal boomerang is coming back.

It can be stated that the currently forming situation in the South Caucasian region will cause Washington and the West to use considerable resources for restoration of the previous (before the recent conflict in South Ossetia) status quo.

Meanwhile the regional players, including official Yerevan, which had sustained a long pause throughout the conflict, hurried to demonstrate their loyalty to the winner - Moscow. However, until recently president Serzh Sargsyan tried to maneuver between the West and Russia because of the not simple internal political situation."

---