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# Saving Georgia

By Ariel Cohen

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Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has announced that Moscow is putting on hold hostilities in Georgia, apparently due to the pleas from the U.S. and Europe to cease aggression against Georgia. Many questions remain open, including:

Signature and stability of the cease-fire; The timing of the Russian withdrawal from sovereign Georgian territory; Recognition of full Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity; and Terminating attempts by Moscow to remove Georgian leadership by force.

The threats to Georgia's political survival and to Southern Caucasus states' independence have not disappeared, and Russia's massive use of force against its small neighbor remains appalling and deeply troubling.

As the Olympic Games opened Friday, August 8, the tragic and ominous conflict between Georgia and Russia erupted as well. Moscow responded with overwhelming force to the Georgian fire on Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin flew from the Beijing Olympics to Vladikavkaz, taking control of the military operations. Putin sidelined his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, thereby leaving no doubt as to who is in charge.

The 58th Russian Army of the North Caucasus Military District rolled into South Ossetia, reinforced by the 76th Airborne "Pskov" Division. The Black Sea Fleet blockaded Georgian coast and shelled the strategic port of Poti. Cossacks from the neighboring Russian territories moved in to combat the Georgians as well.

Following the third day of heavy fighting, and after rejecting the Georgian cease-fire offer, Russia has struck far beyond contested South Ossetia, opening up a second front in Abkhazia. Pushing deep into Georgia, the Russian Army has seized military bases and several towns including Senaki and Zugdidi, as well as the key Georgian city of Gori, the birthplace of the Soviet tyrant Joseph Stalin. By taking Gori and the east-west highway passing through the town, the Russians have effectively cut the country in half, severing its main transportation artery.

Russian forces have also bombed the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the only avenue for exporting Central Asian energy, which is independent of Russian control. Throwing aside any pretense of "stopping a genocide," the Russian troops pushed forward and, on Monday evening, were 20 kilometers away from the Georgian capital Tbilisi. There is a good chance that these troops will advance on Tbilisi in the next 24 hours.

Russia's goals for the war with Georgia are far-reaching and include:

Expulsion of Georgian troops and termination of Georgian sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia; "Regime change" by bringing down President Mikheil Saakashvili and installing a more pro-Russian leadership in Tbilisi; Preventing Georgia from joining NATO and sending a strong message to Ukraine that its insistence on NATO membership may lead to war and/or its dismemberment; Shifting control of the Caucasus, and especially over strategic energy pipelines, by controlling Georgia; and Recreating a 19th-century-style sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union, by the use of force if necessary.

## Rebuilding the Russian Empire: The Challenge to Europe's Status Quo

Russian relations with Georgia were the worst among the post-Soviet states. In addition to fanning the flames of separatism in South Ossetia since 1990, Russia militarily supported separatists in Abkhazia (1992-93), which is also a part of Georgian territory. Russia also had a cantankerous relationship with then-Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister, whom hardliners in Moscow blamed for the Soviet withdrawal from Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, there were two assassination attempts against Shevardnadze, and elements of the Russian state, such as secret services or military intelligence, came under suspicion both times.

Russia has long prepared its aggression against Georgia's pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili, in order to undermine his rule and prevent Georgia from joining NATO. Despite claims about oppressed minority status, the separatist South Ossetian leadership is mostly ethnic Russians, many of whom served in the KGB, the Soviet secret police, the Russian military, or the Soviet communist party.

In recent years, Moscow granted the majority of Abkhazs and South Ossetians Russian citizenship and moved to establish close economic and bureaucratic ties with the two separatist republics, effectively enacting a creeping annexation of both territories.

The use of Russian citizenship to create a "protected" population residing in a neighboring state to undermine its sovereignty is a slippery slope that is now leading to a redrawing of the former Soviet borders. Brave voices asserted that Russia lost the moral right for peacekeeping in Abkhazia and South Ossetia when, circumventing the leadership of sovereign Georgia, it

became close friends with the de facto organs of power of these self-declared entities. Now, casting aside any decency, bringing airborne units into Georgia, bombing territory that isn't even part of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Republic, Russia ... has become a party to an armed conflict.

No valiant Western voice issued this statement. As has so frequently been the case throughout history, the above-mentioned statement was made by a pitifully small but morally righteous group of Russian human rights activists, led by Lev Ponomarev, Sergei Kovalyov, and Yelena Bonner (Andrey Sakharov's widow). The group proceeded to call for Russia to be expelled from the Group of Eight (G-8), and for the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to impose sanctions on Russia.

### Chilling Language, Strategic Actions

Aggression against Georgia also sends a strong signal to Ukraine and Europe. Russia is playing a chess game of offense and intimidation. Former president and current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin spoke last spring about Russia "dismembering" Ukraine, another NATO candidate, and detaching the Crimea, a peninsula that was transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 when both were integral parts of the Soviet Union.

Today, up to 50 percent of Ukrainian citizens speak Russian as their first language, and ethnic Russians comprise approximately one-fifth of Ukraine's population. With encouragement from Moscow, these people may be induced to follow South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Mother Russia's bosom. Yet Ukraine's pro-Western leaders, such as President Victor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko, have expressed a desire to join NATO, while pro-Moscow Ukrainian Party of Regions effectively opposes membership. NATO opponents in Ukraine are greatly encouraged by Russia's action against Georgia.

Beyond this, Russia is demonstrating that it can sabotage American and European Union (EU) declarations about integrating Commonwealth of Independent States members into Western structures such as NATO. By attempting to accomplish regime change in Georgia, Moscow is also trying to gain control of the energy and transportation corridor which connects Central Asia and Azerbaijan with the Black Sea and ocean routes overseas--for oil, gas and other commodities.

A pro-Russian regime in Georgia will also bring the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Erzurum (Turkey) gas pipeline under Moscow's control. Such a development would undermine any options of pro-Western orientation for Azerbaijan and Armenia, along with any chances of resolving their conflict based on diplomacy and Western-style cooperation.

#### The West's Hour of Truth

The United States and its European allies must take all available diplomatic measures to stop Russian aggression. To uphold the international order, to repel aggression, and to advance our national interests and those of the West at large, the U.S. should:

Send Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Europe to coordinate support for condemning Russian aggression in Georgia among our allies. The U.S. and Europe should lead the world in demanding that Russia withdraw all its troops from the territory of Georgia and recognize Georgia's territorial integrity; Convey to Russia that its invasion of Georgia has forfeited its membership in the G-8 and may derail its aspirations to join the World Trade Organization and to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, only 200 kilometers from Georgia; Push for great powers to speak out, including Germany, France, India, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Turkey, and possibly China. This support would "globalize" the condemnation; Continue pressure within the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly to achieve a resolution that will voice full and unequivocal support for Georgian territorial integrity, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and for Russian troop withdrawal; Send international observers to Georgia from OSCE, the EU and the United Nations in order to expand mediation efforts to withdraw Russian forces; Begin talks at a neutral forum such as the OSCE to finally settle the South Ossetian matter as well as future Abkhazian problems. This can be done by granting these territories full autonomy within the Georgian state, as Tbilisi has repeatedly suggested; Reiterate NATO's position on Ukraine, which holds that the country will become a member of NATO through the extension of a Membership Action Plan and that the member states look forward to assessing Ukraine's progress at the December 2008 meeting; Announce the deployment of amphibious ships into the Black Sea as a non-combatant Evacuation Operations, which will be coordinated with all Black Sea littoral states; and Offer humanitarian assistance to Georgia, such as aiding the wounded and refugees, and evacuating the friends of the U.S. if necessary.

Beyond this, the United States, its allies, and other countries need to send a strong signal to Moscow that creating 19th-century-style spheres of influence and redrawing the borders of the former Soviet Union is a danger to world peace. The U.S. and its European allies should communicate to Moscow that its aggression will not stand and cannot be accomplished without irreparable harm to Russia's international standing for decades to come. The U.S., its allies and Europe must do everything possible to stop the aggression against Georgia.

Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies and International Energy Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

