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# Georgia cant take back provinces

By Fred Thompson  
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I have a great affection for Georgia. But in thinking about this situation, we ought to bear two facts in mind.

The first is that the Republic of Georgia, using tanks, artillery and infantry, invaded South Ossetia on Aug. 8 to take it back. The Financial Times reported that the Georgian military believed that South Ossetia could be captured within 48 hours. However, success depended upon strategic surprise and quick control of the Roki Tunnel, neither of which happened. The second is that the Russians squashed the Georgians like bugs.

Why do Abkhazia and South Ossetia want to separate from Georgia? Why do they prefer Russia?

Undoubtedly all sorts of ethnic conflicts and cultural incompatibilities, about which I know nothing, play a part. But one big problem is that the Georgians insist upon using their own language and unique orthography, which neither the Abkhazians or the South Ossetians understand, and rejecting Russian, which they do. Besides, Abkhazia was once Russia's Riviera and South Ossetia has natural ties to the North Ossetian autonomous region in Russia.

Were I an Abkhazian or a South Ossetian, I too would probably prefer to join Russia. I might reconsider if something like the Swiss confederation were on the table, especially if it included Azerbaijan and Armenia, but it's not.

De facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been independent of Georgia since 1992-93, although Georgia still claims them as "autonomous" districts. As recent events have shown, that is much like Spain claiming sovereignty over California.

The Russians like to compare South Ossetia to Kosovo, which is really a pretty good analogy. The cases are parallel ' substituting Kosovo for South Ossetia, Serbia for Georgia and Russia playing the part in South Ossetia played by the U.S. in Kosovo. The big difference is that Russia generally opposes secessionists and somewhat schizophrenically continued to insist on Georgia's de jure sovereignty over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while supporting their de facto independence.

(Another good analogy is Britain's recognition of U.S. sovereignty in the area between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River prior to the War of 1812, while insisting upon the right to enforce its territorial guarantees to the Amerindian tribes in the region. Like Russia in Georgia, the Brits were also very slow to abandon their military bases in the area after American independence. One could go further still and liken Georgia's invasion of South Ossetia to the battle of Tippecanoe, except, obviously, for the outcome.

Now, perhaps, the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be settled and Georgia can get over its irredentist preoccupation and concentrate on building an economically viable, democratic state in what is one of the best places on Earth. Of course, that depends on the Russians' quitting of the remainder of Georgia.

American efforts ought to focus on persuading the Russians to go home, taking Abkhazia and South Ossetia with them.

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