
More On Georgia's Ethnic Cleansing Lawsuit, Ethnic Cleansing Of Georgians In Abkhazia, & Related Issues

By Damozel
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I wrote yesterday about the conflicting ambitions and hatreds in play here (which Russia is manipulating to further its own ambitions). The situation is an immense tangle of conflicting ambitions--in the form of the desire for land and resources-- and furious ethnic hatred.

As I noted yesterday, Georgia is now bringing a lawsuit against Russia for ethnic cleansing:

"Today, the Georgian ambassador to the Netherlands filed a law suit to the International Court of Justice called 'The state of Georgia against the state of Russia' because of ethnic cleansing conducted in Georgia by Russia in 1993 to 2008," Lomaia told Reuters.

The ICJ confirmed Georgia's filing, in which the country accused Russia of violating an anti-discrimination convention during three interventions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia from 1990 to August 2008. Georgia requested the court to order Russia to comply with the convention, cease all military activities in Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and withdraw its troops, Georgia said in a filing released by the ICJ.

The Russians have allegedly assisted citizens of Georgia's separatist enclaves in driving out Georgians in the past.

The Georgians can live here no longer, in Abkhazia they can only die"

According to Wikipedia--and read this with whatever caveats apply, of course--:

The Ethnic Cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia, also known as Genocide of Georgians in Abkhazia (according to the Georgian side and by number of western scholars)... or the Massacres of Georgians in Abkhazia -- refers to ethnic cleansing massacres and forced mass expulsion of thousands of ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia (de jure Autonomous Republic of Georgia) during the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1991-1993 and 1998.

Between 10,000 to 30,000 Georgians were killed by the Abkhaz separatists, foreign mercenaries, and, allegedly, by Russian Federation forces. Local Armenians, Greeks, Russians and moderate Abkhaz were also killed.

The International Criminal Court is currently investigating allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity in Abkhazia. The ICC was provided with the documents selected from the 300 volumes of evidence about the genocide of Georgians in Abkhazia. These materials were collected by the Georgian Prosecutors' Office beginning in 1993 and allegedly contain horrific accounts of atrocities committed by the Abkhaz fighters and mercenaries from Russia. The reports included a detailed description of how the separatists played soccer with the heads of dead Georgians on the field after the executions in Gagra.

The Russians have aided the separatists in both Georgian enclaves financially and probably also militarily. (BBC News, Steven Eke) On August 8, the BBC's Russian affairs analyst wrote:

[Russia] has supported the separatist regime financially and militarily, and reportedly has a considerable number of security and intelligence operatives there.

Georgia also claims that Russian mercenaries are active in South Ossetia....

The "frozen" nature of the South Ossetian conflict - as well as that in the other, separatist Georgian region, Abkhazia - has allowed Russia to preserve a vital lever of influence over its southern neighbour, a country it now views as wayward, if not hostile....

Russia has issued most South Ossetians with Russian passports, potentially justifying direct intervention (on the grounds of protecting "its own" citizens).

Recent heightened military tension had effectively given Russia a more solid pretext for intervention.

With respect to the South Ossetian/Georgia conflict:

There are also clear fault lines between Russia and the West in dealing with the immediate tensions.

A Russian-drafted UN Security Council statement calling on both Georgia and South Ossetia to renounce the use of force failed to secure British and US backing. (BBC News)

On the other hand, there are currently allegations that the Georgians have engaged in ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia. The Washington Post reported:

Despite Western governments' public statements of support for Saakashvili, some Western diplomats now privately say that the Georgian leadership or military made a serious and possibly criminal mistake last week by launching a massive barrage against the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, which inevitably led to major civilian deaths and casualties.

Russian officials have said 2,000 people were killed in the Georgian offensive, a figure that has not been confirmed independently. But it is indisputable that large numbers of civilians were killed in and around Tskhinvali.

Reports are still coming in concerning deaths in South Ossetia resulting from Georgia's attack last week:

Russia says 1,600 South Ossetian civilians have been killed, while Georgia has reported close to 200 killed and hundreds of wounded. Neither set of figures has been independently verified.

The United Nations said on Tuesday that nearly 100,000 people had been driven from their homes.

"We have started to receive communications on this," the ICC's Moreno-Ocampo told Reuters by telephone from The Hague.

Asked if he would be launching a preliminary investigation, he said: "It is a possibility." He gave no further details.

As I wrote yesterday, I'm not clear whether either party has any moral high ground on this score, particularly at this stage. I'm still not. On the other hand, Russia's alleged continued bombing of the city of Gori raises questions about their own intentions toward the Georgians. And with respect to the South Ossetians, there's this: Georgian officials and U.S. officials said

Tuesday night that Ossetian paramilitary forces were killing remaining civilians in Georgian villages near the South Ossetian-Georgian frontier and that Russian forces were failing to stop them despite entreaties from the authorities in Tbilisi. "It's bloodcurdling," one Western diplomat said. (WaPo)

It is painful to watch such tragedies unfold again and again.

Reflecting on them, it's very hard not to conclude that the notions that human life is cheap, that individual lives are of less value than access to real estate and that some lives are of less value than others, really are ineradicably encoded in the human brain. It's a specialized form of sociopathy that we see in controlled and diluted form in our own culture. Spectacles such as these make one wonder whether this sort of conflict and reflexive hatred is the norm and western civilization, with its emphasis on multiculturalism and celebrating our differences, the anomaly. Under sufficient pressure, would we always revert to a Golding sort of world? I don't want to believe it, but sometimes it's very hard not to.

In the meantime, Russia is apparently doing its all to work these hatreds to its own advantage while trying to position itself as intervening out of a disinterested wish to keep the peace. I do not believe them.

On a related topic, see Joe Windish's piece on the current cyberwar in Georgia and the surrounding questions.

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