
Russia suspects foreign involvement in Georgian provocation

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ILULISSAT (Greenland), May 28 (RIA Novosti) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that third parties could be behind Georgia's provocative actions against Russia.

Relations between Russia and Georgia have been consistently strained since President Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in Georgia four years ago, with both sides being involved in numerous disputes, most recently over Russia's moves to develop closer ties with Georgia's two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

"I do not understand what they [the Georgian authorities] want; unless they are being used [by someone else] to constantly provoke Russia," Lavrov said at a ministerial meeting of the five states bordering the Arctic Ocean, held in Ilulissat, western Greenland.

"I doubt they would come up with these provocative actions on their own," he added.

Bilateral relations saw a new low this week when the Georgian Foreign Ministry demanded that Russia give an official apology and pay compensation following the alleged shooting down of an unmanned reconnaissance drone by a Russian aircraft in April.

A UN report published on Monday, based on video footage and radar records, confirmed Georgia's earlier claims that on April 20 the Russian Air Force shot down a Georgian drone over the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia. Russia's Defense Ministry has dismissed the report.

Georgia called the downing an act of aggression, an assessment shared by some Western countries.

Moscow has accused Tbilisi of violating a ceasefire agreement by sending spy planes into the conflict zone, where it has maintained peacekeeping troops since bloody conflicts ended in the early 1990s.

Tbilisi is also demanding the withdrawal of additional peacekeepers deployed by Russia in Abkhazia and the annulment of former-president Vladimir Putin's decree issued on April 16 urging closer ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been a source of tensions between the former Soviet allies, with Tbilisi accusing Moscow of backing separatism on its sovereign territory.

Lavrov also said the current Georgian leadership would most likely withdraw from its earlier agreements to set up a joint counter-terrorism center with Russia and not to allow the deployment of foreign bases on its territory.

Georgia earlier announced its withdrawal from a 1995 CIS unified air defense agreement signed by a number of former Soviet republics, including Russia.
