

THE RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT



ROSH, THE RUSSIAN BEAR RETURNS

“The Sovereign Master, YHWH, says: ‘Listen! I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Rosh (Russia) ... I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws and bring you out with your whole army ... Persia ... Togarmah from the far north (*Turkey and the people of Central Asia*) with all its troops - many nations with you. Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them.’” (Ezekiel 38:3-7)

GEORGIA ATTEMPTS TO RECLAIM A BREAKAWY PROVINCE, BUT IS CRUSHED BY ITS INVIGORATED NEIGHBOUR

Georgia is a former Soviet state situated between Turkey and Russia, and bordering the Black Sea. This Caucasian nation was ruled by Moscow for most of the two centuries preceding the breakup of the Soviet Union.

(Caucasian nations are those of the region of SE Europe between the Black & Caspian seas, which are situated around the Caucasus Mountain range.)



THE CAUCASUS

On August 7, the Georgian government in Tbilisi launched an assault on South Ossetia in an attempt to retake this small province that had broken away from Georgia in the 1990s. On August 8, after heavy overnight aerial strikes, Georgian tanks and infantry captured Tskhinvali, the capital

of the province. Dozens of people were killed. South Ossetians fleeing to Russia said that Georgian forces had burned their homes, forcing them to flee.

While the attention of the world was taken up by the opening of the Beijing Olympics, Moscow responded to Georgia's attempt to reassert its authority in South Ossetia by sending in thousands of Russian troops and tanks. According to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the action was "to prevent genocide."

The war soon widened to include Abkhazia, a second and much larger breakaway region - in the NW of Georgia. In the ensuing Georgian-Russian conflict many civilians died, and up to 100,000 were displaced.

Villagers from in and around the two enclaves fled en masse as Russian-backed militia pillaged homes and set their villages on fire.

OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

South Ossetia with a population of 70,000, gained a type of autonomy after a war that ended in 1992, but it has been a source of tension ever since. Moscow has supported the breakaway movements in both Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Russian peacekeepers have patrolled the provinces for the past 15 years.

Under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia granted citizenship and distributed passports to virtually all of the adult residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Western nations have been skeptical of the validity of Russia's handing out passports by the thousands to citizens of another nation.



SAAKASHVILI'S GOALS

There were four regions out of Georgian control when President Mikheil Saakashvili took office in 2004, but he restored two smaller regions, Ajaria in 2004 and the upper Kodori Gorge in 2006, with few deaths.

Those victories gave him a sense of momentum, and he kept national reintegration as a central plank of his platform. In spite of Russia's warnings, Mr. Saakashvili grew bolder, and finally believed it was time to reclaim S. Ossetia.

RUSSIA'S RESPONSE

Russia used overwhelming military force against Georgia, including strategic bombers and ballistic missiles, that was disproportionate to any threat from the former Soviet state.

On August 10, Russia poured an additional 10,000 men and armor into South Ossetia, and after a 3-day battle, Georgian forces retreated, and the Russian troops took over Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital.

Almost 40,000 refugees fled to Russia in the first two days, threatening a humanitarian catastrophe.

Tskhinvali, was said to have been 'almost destroyed' in onslaughts by both sides. Bodies lay in the streets and hospitals were overwhelmed with wounded.

Georgia denounced a “new aggression” by Moscow in Abkhazia, the province on the Black Sea coast.

The conflict widened when the Abkhaz leader called up reservists and ordered 1,000 troops to push Georgian forces out of the Kodori Gorge, a strategic pocket of territory in Abkhazia.

The Abkhazian forces, backed by the Russians, pushed out Georgian troops, and then moved deeper into Georgia, defiantly planting a flag and laughing that “retreating Georgians had received American training in running away.”

Russian jets widened the offensive by bombing the central Georgian town of Gori – the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. On August 13, Russian tanks rolled into Gori, and later pressed deeper as they headed towards Tbilisi, the Georgian capital.

CYBER WAR

At least a week before Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, the country had come under attack – in cyberspace. Millions of simultaneous hits on the Georgian websites, including President Mikheil Saakashvili’s site, overloaded the Georgian servers, causing them to crash. Georgia was quick to accuse the Russian Government of collapsing its servers.

ETHNIC CLEANSING

Both sides accused each other of ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia. Both may be right. The Georgians wanted to drive the pro-Russian Ossetian rebels over the border into Russian-North Ossetia. The Russians wanted to drive the pro-Georgian Ossetians over the border into Georgia proper.

Foreign journalists witnessed an air attack on the town of Gori, and the Georgian government claimed Russian bombers had ‘completely devastated’ its Black Sea port of Poti. Up to 11 Russian jets reportedly hit container tanks and a shipbuilding plant at Poti.

Russia has reportedly started to bomb civil and economic infrastructure, including the military base at Senaki.

A DAVID & GOLIATH SITUATION

Georgia’s war with Russia is a David and Goliath battle that military experts say, the tiny Black Sea state has no chance of winning.

The Georgians are outnumbered and outgunned in every department. Russia has about 697,000 troops, while Georgia has only 19,500 full-time regulars. And with Russia’s 1,200 combat aircraft confronting Georgia’s seven outmoded support planes, and 6,000 tanks against 100 ageing machines, there is no contest.

But even with international diplomacy, Georgia may barely survive total subjugation, or at least domination by the Russian Goliath.

RUSSIA’S CONTENTION WITH GEORGIA

Russia has had severe gripes about Georgia from the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Currently ...

1. Russia is angered by Georgia’s pro-Western policies and its seeking of NATO membership — a bid Moscow regards as part of a Western effort to weaken its influence in the region. With NATO

expanding and embracing former Russian-allies, Moscow wants to prevent Georgia getting into NATO.

2. The action in Georgia is Moscow's payback for the US-NATO action to detach Kosovo from Serbia and launch it on the way to independence – all of which Russia opposed.

3. Moscow is rankled by plans of Western oil companies, including Israeli firms, to expand the BTC oil pipeline that will route oil, not only from Azerbaijan, but also from Kazakhstan, as well as gas from Turkmenistan, through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean coast - instead of hooking them up to Russian pipelines.

(The South Caucasus Gas Pipeline taking natural gas to Erzerum in Turkey runs alongside the BTC oil pipeline.) Earlier, all Central Asian oil flowed through the Soviet Union.



THE BTC OIL & GAS PIPELINES

More than the above concerns, Moscow wants to reassert its dominance over the whole Caucasus region which is strategic to Russia's interests and access to the Middle East.

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S GOAL

The Washington Post (Aug 11, 08) writes:

"This war did not begin because of a miscalculation by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. It is a war that Moscow has been attempting to provoke for some time. The man who once called the collapse of the Soviet Union 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century,' has re-established a virtual czarist rule in Russia and is trying to restore the country to its once-dominant role in Eurasia and the world. Armed with wealth from oil and gas; holding a near-monopoly over the energy supply to Europe; with a million soldiers, thousands of nuclear warheads and the world's third-largest military budget, Vladimir Putin believes that now is the time to make his move.



THE DEEPENING OIL WAR

On the surface, the Russians are backing the separatists of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia as payback for the strengthening of American influence in Georgia with its 4.5 million inhabitants.

But more immediately, the conflict has been sparked by the race for control over the pipelines carrying oil and gas out of the Caspian region.

Russian ships blockaded the Black Sea coast of Georgia. This, with the general offensive, threatens the flow of oil from Azerbaijan, via the western-built Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. This is the only pipeline in the region that avoids both Russia and Iran.

Energy experts say that the hostilities between Russia and Georgia could threaten American plans to gain access to more of Central Asia's energy resources at a time when booming demand in Asia and tight supplies helped push the price of oil to record highs.

"The Russians treasured the fact they had a monopoly on oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia, as it gave them considerable clout," said Marshall I. Goldman, a senior scholar for Russian studies at Harvard. "By agreeing to have an oil pipeline, Georgia made itself more vulnerable."

On August 13, the BTC pipeline was shut down after it was hit by an explosion in Eastern Turkey. Kurdish separatists claimed responsibility, although it remains unclear what caused the blast.

THE ISRAEL-GEORGIA CONNECTION

Jerusalem owns a strong interest in Caspian oil and gas pipelines that reach the Turkish terminal port of Ceyhan, and avoid the Russian network.

Intense negotiations are afoot between Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan for additional pipelines so that Central Asian oil flows to Turkey and thence to Israel's oil terminal at Ashkelon, and on to its Red Sea port of Eilat. From there, supertankers can carry the gas and oil to the Far East through the Indian Ocean.

The Israel-Georgia connection is estimated to be worth \$1 billion.

With the eruption of fighting between Russia and Georgia, Israel has found itself in an awkward position as a result of its arms sales and support to Georgia. Israel is now caught between its friendly relations with the Caucasian state, and its fear that continued sale of weapons will spark Russian retribution in the form of increased arms sales to Iran and Syria.

Under the pressure of Russian threats, Israel's Foreign Ministry recommended suspending the sale of all weapons and defence-related equipment to Georgia. New contracts were not approved and arms sales were scaled back. Georgia's request for 200 advanced Israeli-made Merkava tanks was turned down.

RUSSIA BOMBS ISRAELI-RUN PLANT

Aug 10. In a "sharp warning" to Israel, Russia bombed a Georgian military plant near Tbilisi, in which Israeli experts were upgrading SU-25 jet fighters for the Georgian military. A fighter jet bombed runways inside the plant.

UKRAINE'S WARNING TO RUSSIA

Aug 10. Ukraine warned Russia it could bar Russian navy ships from returning to their base in the Crimea because of their deployment on Georgia's coast. (The Crimea is the peninsula of South Ukraine, extending into Black Sea.)

The statement reflected a strong Ukrainian support for Georgia and is certain to anger Moscow, further straining Russian-Ukrainian relations.

A 1997 agreement between Russia and Ukraine lets the Black Sea Fleet remain in Sevastopol up to 2017. Ukrainian officials have said they want it out after that.

Both Ukraine and Georgia have sought to free themselves of Russia's influence, and to integrate into the West and NATO.

Five allies of Georgia who were former Soviet nations - Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine - appeared together with the Georgian President near the end of the first week of the war.

THE EU & NATO'S RESPONSE

Although Georgia is an ally of the West and Israel, and it is an applicant for NATO membership, in this crisis, the EU and NATO were unwilling, or unable, to do much more to help Georgia than to issue some warnings, and demand a ceasefire. They were compelled to accept the fact that the northern bear was clawing back an erring cub into its own domain, and that Russia was regaining its former Soviet superpower status.

When the Russians targeted the Caspian Sea pipeline and mined Georgia's oil exporting facilities in Poti, a Georgian port on the Black Sea, the EU "suddenly remembered it had other things to do." (Poti is one of Europe's principle oil supply lines.)

When NATO realized that Russia had no intention of backing down, it reminded the Georgians that NATO had only committed to admitting them — they weren't members yet. So NATO was under no treaty obligation to come to Georgia's defence.

SARKOZY'S EFFORT TO BROKER PEACE

Of course, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, as current EU chief, made a trip to Moscow and Tbilisi, and managed to forge a "peace agreement." He arrived back home with a piece of paper, acclaiming peace in our time, but the one-sided ceasefire agreement not only left the Russian military in place in the disputed enclaves, it allowed them freedom to continue operations inside Georgia.

An analyst writing in *The Times* commented: "This, remember, is the same EU that wants to take over foreign and security policy from member states, an institution that is always eager to pump itself up at the expense of democratic institutions in those member states, but which crumbles into puny submission when faced with authoritarian bullying overseas."

Earlier the Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, announced: "I have taken the decision to end the operation to force Georgian authorities into peace. The security of our peacekeepers and civilians has been restored. **The aggressor has been punished** and has suffered very significant losses. Its military has been disorganised."

Speaking at a joint news conference with Sarkozy, Medvedev insisted **his forces would remain in South Ossetia and Abkhazia**. "That has been the case and that will continue to be the case," he said.

Eduard Kokoity, the leader of the South Ossetian separatist movement, said that following the conflict he would redouble his efforts to have his province **unified with the Russian region of North Ossetia**.

EU foreign ministers agreed to send peacekeepers to help supervise the fragile Russia-Georgia peace process, putting off discussions on potential diplomatic sanctions against Russia until next month.

THE U.S. RESPONSE

<http://www.maranathamrc.com/>

Russia is following Iran's example in exploiting Washington's current inhibition to advance its goals by force. Putin knows the US will not go to war to defend Georgia, or the Ukraine, or any of the former Soviet Union states.

Moscow disdains Washington's lack of muscle, and this will further encourage Tehran and its terrorist proxies to defy the international community, and the US in particular.

But after a muted timid response, the Bush administration seems to have been goaded into stronger action by Sarkozy's disastrous piece of diplomacy.

AUG 14. After six days of dithering, President Bush responded to the crisis by sending US Navy ships and Air Force cargo planes to deliver humanitarian aid to the war-torn Georgia.

As the US ships will need to challenge the Russian ships, the move is seen as an act of brinkmanship. The presence of US military planes and ships is intended to send a powerful assurance to all involved, that Washington will stand by its allies, and that US forces can and will operate in Russia's backyard. It's a message that will intensify the deepening tension and divide between the US and Russia. Already Russia has warned Israel about supporting Georgia.

One immediate US action was to call off a joint NATO-Russian military exercise scheduled for Aug 15-23. That exercise was to involve warships from Russia, France, Britain and the US.

Washington also threatened Moscow with diplomatic retaliation for its military operations on Georgian territory, and has hinted that it would push for a ban on Russian participation in high-level international forums such as the Group of Eight and the World Trade Organisation, if Moscow does not cooperate with attempts to reach a lasting cease-fire.

The Bush administration has, at last, dropped its love affair with Vladimir Putin, and has raised the stakes by direct assistance to Georgia.

Behind the scenes the future of the G8 group of nations is under threat. Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the US may decide to disband the group by removing Russia from future talks.

The US and EU can make life very uncomfortable for Putin, as Russia's prosperity depends on its continuing integration into the global economy. Moscow prizes its valuable seat in the G8, and it wants to join the WTO and also the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

But inflicting punishment on Moscow will hurt the US and EU also, as Russia could cause trouble over Iran. Besides, Russia holds an alarmingly large quantity of US official debt. Moreover it could play havoc with the West's energy supplies.

Russia, like Iran, believes it has some powerful trump cards in its hands.

RUSSIA'S WARNING

On August 14, Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said that Georgia could "forget about" getting back the two separatist regions in Georgia.

Lavrov also called Georgia's leadership "a special project of the United States." "At some point," he said, "the US will have to choose either support for a virtual project, or real partnership [with Russia] on issues that demand collective action."

President Medvedev met with the leaders in the Kremlin this past week, raising the prospect of Moscow absorbing the two regions, even though the territory is internationally recognized as being within Georgia's borders.

Russia's action in Georgia is also a warning to former Soviet nations against opting to line up with the US, EU and NATO in areas which Moscow deems part of its strategic sphere of influence.

Russia, which is flush with petrodollars because of the rise in the price of oil, has not been afraid to flex its muscle in recent years to bring its neighbors in line.

Two years ago, *Gazprom*, **the national oil company then run by Dmitry A. Medvedev**, now the Russian president, cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine in the winter because of a price dispute.

Aug 15. As the US secretary of state arrived in Tbilisi to reaffirm Washington's support for Georgia, doubt remained about whether Russia will honor the agreement to pull back its forces.

Russian troops were still blocking entrance into the city of Gori. The Russian troops' presence there effectively cuts the country in two.

On August 17, Russian forces dug foxholes along a hill and took up positions only 30 minutes drive from the Georgian capital.

Sergei Lavrov said Russia would not withdraw troops until Moscow was satisfied security measures allowed under the agreement were effective.

But on August 16, President Bush had warned that Russia cannot lay claim to the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

An article in *The euobserver.com* (18 August 08) says ...

RUSSIA INVADED GEORGIA TO TEACH THE WEST 3 LESSONS

Lesson one: No matter how democratic, enthusiastically pro-American and EU-aspiring a country, if Moscow considers it to be in its sphere of influence, it will not be allowed to shape its own destiny. This extends to Ukraine.

Lesson two: No matter how much the US and its European allies attempt to increase their energy security by seeking new routes to Caspian oil and gas resources not controlled by Russia or Iran, Moscow will do its utmost, even to killing thousands in a war, to block Western access. And Russia's increasing dominance of Europe's energy imports, overwhelming stake in world natural gas supplies, and designs for a 'gas OPEC,' should not be challenged.

Lesson three: In the context of a post Group of Eight summit call from Moscow to fundamentally over-haul global security and economic institutions that are too dependent on 'one country and one currency,' Russia's invasion of a small neighbouring country is a demonstration of contempt for a world order that does not respect Russia as it should.

In September, President Dmitry Medvedev intends to unveil a new security paradigm for Eurasia, with an aim to replace NATO.

<http://euobserver.com/9/26611/?rk=1>

THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The Caucasian standoff has profound ramifications for the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and for the International Order.

Along with other recent signs and stresses, the conflict has forced the West to reassess its security concerns vis-à-vis the resurgent, aggressive Rosh.

All over Eastern Europe new assessments about the benefits of friendship with the West are now being made.

At the same time, much international opinion has hardened against Russia.

On August 14, **Poland and the US** signed a deal for Poland to accept a missile interceptor base as part of a system the US says is aimed at blocking attacks by rogue nations. Moscow, however, feels it is aimed at Russia's missile force.

The next day, a top Russian general said Poland's agreement to accept a U.S. missile interceptor base exposes the ex-communist nation to attack, possibly by nuclear weapons. "Poland, by deploying the system is exposing itself to a strike – 100%."

The statement by Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn is the strongest threat that Russia has issued against the plans to put missile defence elements in former Soviet satellite nations.

Escalating tensions between Russia and the West over the war in Georgia are also raising **concerns in Israel** that broken relations with Moscow might jeopardize international efforts to block **Iran's nuclear program**. And Russia could seriously complicate an Israeli air strike against Iranian nuclear facilities if Moscow goes through with a deal to supply Tehran with advanced S-300 anti-aircraft missiles.

Russia's resurgence is due largely to the billions it earns from oil and gas exports, but, like Iran, it has a selfish interest in **keeping oil prices high**. It also has bigger goals than merely overthrowing the pro-west President of Georgia - it wants to dominate Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, as well. It is bent on dominating the Caucuses as part of a revived Russian imperialism that sees the future of the country tied into pushing southward and linking up with Islamic allies throughout the Middle East.

In June, Vladimir Putin compared the US to a "frightening monster." But now there's **a frightening bear also on the block**.

A battle of wits, wills and brinkmanship is now under way, with all its dangers and alarms. Tensions that have been building up for some time are now giving way to hostility. A new cold war is opening up which is likely to lead to World War 3 – all in due time.

As the rift between East and West widens, we get closer to Ezekiel 38 every day.

So my dear believing friend, let's keep on, looking up!

"Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and take to heart, *and guard and keep what is written in it, for*

THE TIME IS NEAR!

(Revelation 1. 3)