

THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN FIVE-DAY WAR: THE PRICE TO BE PAID AND ITS UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

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*I cannot forecast to you the action of
Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery
inside an enigma.*

Winston Churchill

Background to the Conflict

The dissolution of empires is frequently violent, and the breakup of the Soviet Union was no exception. The collapse of the U.S.S.R. was marked by ethnically-based violence, especially in the Southern Caucasus. Since its independence, Georgia has been the most vocally independent-minded country in the former Soviet Union. As Georgia's ambitions to draw close to Europe and the transatlantic community became clearer, its relations with Russia deteriorated.

After the Rose Revolution relations between Georgia and Russia remain problematic due to Russia's continuing political, economic and military support to separatist governments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In recent years, Moscow granted the majority of Abkhaz and South Ossetians Russian citizenship and moved to establish close economic and bureaucratic ties with the two separatist repub-

lics, effectively enacting a creeping annexation of both territories. 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.

Russia’s recent attack on Georgia followed several years of provocative acts engineered in Moscow to destabilize Georgia. In the summer of 2006, tension increased between Tbilisi and Moscow. The Georgian government conducted a police operation to eliminate organized criminal groups operating in the Upper Kodori Valley region of Abkhazia, which restored the rule of law and the government’s authority over this portion of its sovereign territory. Georgia later arrested several Russian military intelligence officers it accused of conducting bombings in Gori. Moscow responded with a vengeance, closing Russia’s only road crossing with Georgia, suspending air and mail links, imposing embargoes against exports of Georgian wine, mineral water, and agricultural goods, and even rounding up people living in Russia (including school children) with ethnic Georgian names and deporting them.¹ At least two Georgians died during the deportation process.²

Russia’s provocations escalated in 2007. In March 2007, what is widely believed to be Russian attack helicopters launched an aerial assault, combined with artillery fire, on the Georgian Government’s administrative offices in Abkhazia’s Upper Kodori Valley. In August, Russian fighter jets violated Georgian airspace, then unsuccessfully launched a missile on a Georgian radar station. In September, a Russian lieutenant colonel and major who were in command of an Abkhaz unit were killed in a clash on the Abkhaz administrative border. Other small skirmishes erupted periodically throughout the fall.

This past year, although Moscow lifted some of the economic and transport embargoes, it further intensified the political pressure by taking a number of steps toward establishing administrative relations with both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In March 2008, Russia announced its unilateral withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) sanctions on Abkhazia, thus removing the CIS prohibition on providing direct economic and military assistance. Then in April, following the NATO summit in Bucharest where NATO leaders declared that Georgia would one day be a member of the alliance, then President Putin issued instructions calling for closer official ties between Russian ministries and their counterparts in both of the disputed regions.

Preparation for an Invasion

There were worrying indicators of the approaching conflict, especially after the buildup of Russian troops above their usual “peacekeeping” levels, multiple violations of Georgian airspace by Russian warplanes, Russia’s downing of Georgian unmanned surveillance drones, and a large-scale Russian military exercise close to the border that rehearsed a scenario similar to its Georgia invasion. Those exercises are just one link in a chain of incidents suggesting that Russia’s military action in Georgia was planned months in advance, awaiting only an appropriate pretext to act. Russia was clearly adding to tension in order to provoke a Georgian response.

Russia also increased military pressure as Russian officials and military personnel were seconded to serve in South Ossetia’s de-facto government in the positions of “prime minister,” “defense

¹ See: “Georgia Files Case against Russia,” *BBC news*, 26 March, 2007, available at [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6497459.stm>].

² See: “Georgian Dies in Moscow Pending Court Ruling on Deportation Case,” *Civil Georgia*, 4 December, 2006, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14232&search=deportation>].

minister,” and “security minister.” On 20 April, Russian pressure took a more ominous turn when a Russian fighter jet shot down an unarmed Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle over Georgian airspace in Abkhazia. Russia also increased its military presence in Abkhazia without consulting with the Government of Georgia. In late April, Russia sent highly-trained airborne combat troops with howitzers to Abkhazia, ostensibly as part of its peacekeeping force. Then in May, Russia dispatched construction troops to Abkhazia to repair a railroad link within the conflict zone.

Meanwhile, Georgia was trying to develop a new road map for conflict resolution and was calling for the establishment of an international police presence in both regions, backed by the robust inclusion of the international community. Georgia stated that once such a force is in place, the government is ready to back its mandate by signing a comprehensive non-use of force pledge. However, Russia downplayed these Georgian openings and resisted intensified discussions, in one case even failing to show up for a mid-June meeting in Berlin sponsored by German government and that President Medvedev promised Russia would attend.

At the same time, Russia launched a large-scale military exercise, “Kavkaz-2008,” in 11 regions in the vicinity of the Georgian border. Approximately 8,000 army servicemen participated in the training, which engaged paratroopers, the Pskov Airborne division, and the Black Sea Fleet. 700 combat vehicles and 20 aircraft were activated and underwent readiness inspections. The Russian authorities referred to the exercise as a pre-planned counter-terrorism operation, but stated also that it aimed to prepare the troops for involvement in special peacekeeping operations due to the latest developments in the region.³ On 7 August, while the Georgian government was trying to negotiate with the Ossetian side they received foreign intelligence reports about the movement of Russian troops toward the Roki tunnel, connecting North Ossetia with the South Ossetian conflict zone. Russian troops began open occupation of Georgia claiming that their aim was to protect Russian citizens and a war started. It should be noted that, according to some reports, Russian information sources began talking as early as 3 August about a war in South Ossetia and this information was spread even before war activities took place.⁴ It is clear that Russia’s political and military leadership executed a pre-planned operation to forcibly and quickly change the status quo in Georgia.

Russia’s Political Objectives in Georgia and Misuse of the Kosovo Case

The objectives of the Russian invasion in Georgia are far-reaching and included:

- (1) “*A cou*” to depose President Saakashvili and change the political regime in Georgia by installing a more pro-Russian leadership in Tbilisi;
- (2) Georgia’s renunciation of its ambition to join NATO and sending a strong message to other Russian “satellites” that should they insist on NATO membership it may end up in war or dismemberment;
- (3) infliction of the maximum damage on Georgia by destroying Georgia’s economy and infrastructure;

³ See: S. Cornel, J. Popjanevski, N. Nillson, *Russia’s War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and World*, 2008, p. 11, available at [<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/0808Georgia-PP.pdf>].

⁴ See: A. Illarionov, *Russia Prepared War with Georgia*, Speech at Cato Institute Summer School, Ukraine, available at [http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8209&Itemid=65].

- (4) recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's sovereignty in order to legalize Russia's permanent military presence in Georgia, and
- (5) monopolization of the Caspian's energy supplies.

It is no secret that Russia is uncomfortable with Georgia's democratic nature and the West's close ties with a country in its "legitimate sphere of influence." So by controlling Georgia (in the event Russia achieves the above-mentioned aims), Russia will actually be able to cut off Central Asia and the Caspian's resources. This means that Russia would be able to isolate and cut off Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries and significantly strengthen its energy monopoly over Europe with all the ensuing results. So it is all about a major shift in energy policy and a major shift in geopolitics based on this energy policy and Russia's energy monopoly.

In addition to that, during the Georgian invasion Moscow had two motives, the lesser of which was a tit-for-tat with respect to Kosovo. If Kosovo could be declared independent under Western sponsorship, then South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the two breakaway regions of Georgia, could be declared independent under Russian sponsorship. Any objections from the United States and Europe would simply confirm their hypocrisy. This was important for internal Russian political reasons, but the second motive was far more important.⁵

By citing the Kosovo precedent, Russia has tied itself in contradictory knots, as a recent commentary in the *Economist* magazine pointed out: "Russia itself is being incoherent by continuing to insist that Kosovo's independence from Serbia is still illegal."⁶ Another even more audacious objective is that Moscow is trying to obtain a reversal of the Kosovo decision by displaying the absurdity of such micro-states that could endlessly disintegrate into smaller entities and by generating unease and displeasure among both its allies and competitors.⁷

It is noteworthy that while misusing the Kosovo case Russia fails to even mention the remarkable international effort that was at the heart of Kosovo's long road to independence. Unlike Kosovo, the Russians invaded Georgia in a fever of war enthusiasm; have refused to pull out and rejected attempts to internationalize the dispute; and have now recognized the enclaves' independence less than three weeks after the war began. In defense of its campaign in South Ossetia, Russia cites Western actions in Kosovo and Iraq. That is neat rhetoric from the Kremlin, but as justification for its assault on Georgia it is plainly cynical. Russia's claim to be "keeping the peace" in South Ossetia is belied by its army's penetration into undisputed Georgian territory and by credible allegations that it is facilitating atrocities by the Ossetian militia.

Moreover, the Russian government has not recognized Kosov's independence. It has not recognized it even after it recognized Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence. Perhaps another of the biggest differences between Kosovo and South Ossetia as Olga Oliker, policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, stated was: "The Kosovo campaign was, fundamentally, about Kosovo, the conflict between Georgia and Russia is not about South Ossetia. It is just the pretext Russia has used to demonstrate its power to its neighbors and to the world."⁸ In general, it is obvious that the Russian government has a double standard policy toward Georgia.

⁵ See: T. Friedman, "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," *Stratfor Analysis*, 12 August, 2008, available at [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power].

⁶ "South Ossetia is not Kosovo," *The Economist*, 28 August, 2008, available at [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12009678].

⁷ See: S. Zurabishvili, "Moscow's Possible Motives in Recognizing Abkhazia, South Ossetia," *RFL*, 24 September, 2008.

⁸ O. Oliker, "Kosovo and South Ossetia More Different than Similar," Rand commentary, available at [<http://www.rand.org/commentary/2008/08/25/RFERL.html>].

War Damage to Georgia

The five-day clash between Russian and Georgian forces in August inflicted serious damage on Georgia's economy both in casualties and in terms of worsening the prospects for development and investment. The material damage has initially been estimated at some 1 billion dollars or about 8 percent of forecast 2008 GDP. The damage was mainly confined to military targets—bases, military airfields, anti-aircraft systems. There was no great damage to civilian targets, including industrial or agricultural assets, with the factory producing military aircraft in Tbilisi being a rare exception. Major communications routes have remained mostly intact. The only exception here was the blowing up by Russian soldiers of a railway bridge 40 kilometers east of Tbilisi on 16 August after the ceasefire. This disrupted rail communication between the eastern and western parts of the country, causing problems not only for Georgia, but also for Azerbaijan and Armenia, for which this railway is an important route. Oil and gas transport from Azerbaijan by rail and pipeline was stopped for fear of damage by military activity. The situation was further aggravated by the appearance of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the need to provide them with supplies.

Along with the various human atrocities, such as the bombing and cleansing of civilian areas, the invaders looted and destroyed numerous historical sites, some of which were profoundly revered by the Georgians as sacred cornerstones of their national identity. This is especially true of the region around South Ossetia that served as a kind of cradle of early Georgian culture. The Georgian Ministry of Culture lists some 500 monuments and archeological sites now mostly under Russian occupation and out of sight.⁹

But probably the most painful loss for Georgia was the damage to its reputation as a safe venue for investment and a secure corridor for fuel transportation. As early as May, Standard and Poor's lowered its outlook for the sovereign credit rating of the government of Georgia from "positive" to "stable," explaining it by the deterioration in relations with Russia and the reinforcement of Russian forces in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the August war, the agency expressed concern that investors may become even more cautious in making investment decisions in Georgia.¹⁰ In particular, the future of the EU's Nabucco gas pipeline project for supplying EU member states with gas from Azerbaijan and Central Asia may have been endangered.

Understanding this and addressing some other problems in post-war Georgia, the international response was quick. The United States has led international aid efforts by committing \$1.06 billion. The European Commission has already pledged €500 million and has asked the member states to contribute an equal amount. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will make \$750 million available to Georgia's Central Bank in the form of a Stand-By Arrangement. Even the Asian Development Bank, which is heavily influenced by China, contributed \$40 million. A series of NATO, EU, and other diplomatic meetings was underway.¹¹ All these efforts and assistance have given Georgia visibility and helped restore investor confidence.

As for Georgia's security, after the Russian aggression NATO launched the new NATO-Georgia Commission aimed at helping Georgia rebuild following Russia's August 2008 invasion and pre-

⁹ See: "What the Russians Left in Their Wake in Georgia," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 September, 2008, available at [<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122220864672268787.html#articleTabs=article>].

¹⁰ See: "Georgia: War Costs Includes Not Just Physical Damage," *Oxford Analytica*, 10 September, 2008, available at [<http://www.oxan.com/display.aspx?StoryDate=20080910&ProductCode=CISDB&StoryNumber=2&StoryType=DB>].

¹¹ See: D. Philips, "Post Conflict Georgia," *Policy Paper*, September 2008, available at [<http://www.acus.org/publication/post-conflict-georgia>].

pare for future NATO membership. Similar to a body established in 1997 to oversee NATO relations with Ukraine, the commission will support Georgia as it pursues its future path toward NATO membership pledged at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Rumania. It will also help Georgia assess the damage from the Russian incursion and restore essential services to communities in the conflict zone.

Russia's Losses after the War

The Kremlin's brutal response, which included occupying large parts of Georgian territory outside South Ossetia and Abkhazia and then rapidly recognizing the independence of the separatist regions, has left Russia diplomatically isolated. Russia is suffering politically and economically in the aftermath of its military intervention into Georgia even though it may have won short-term gains; Moscow is now more isolated and less trusted than it was a year ago. Dozens of nations and international organizations, including its partners in both the G8 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have spoken out against Moscow's attempts to forcibly redraw Europe's boundaries. So far, only one country, Nicaragua, has followed the Kremlin in recognizing Georgia's breakaway regions, which as U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated "is hardly a diplomatic triumph."¹²

Moscow's undisguised desire to try and chip off pieces of territory from neighboring states inevitably provoked a growth in mistrust toward Russia among those post-Soviet countries where separatist manifestations exist or are possible. It is fascinating in this respect to see the contrast in the days of Moscow's military victory between the silence of Russia's allies in the ex-Soviet space and the confrontational attitude of its opponents.

The invasion of Georgia has further deepened the complexity of diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia, a relationship whose future will likely see a mix of competition, conflict, and cooperation. Moreover, the Russia described by President Dmitry Medvedev during his 2008 election campaign — a Russia that aspires to become fully integrated into the international system and its institutions and seeks to use its newfound energy wealth to diversify its economy, rebuild infrastructure, open its political system to the rule of law, and confront a host of societal challenges — finds itself at risk. Russia's financial markets have lost nearly a third of their value — hundreds of billions of dollars in market capitalization. Investors have pulled an estimated \$20 billion out of the country. Meanwhile, the ruble has depreciated by nearly 10 percent, forcing the Russian Central Bank to spend billions to stop the slide.¹³

Another big loss for Russia is that it has also failed to stop Georgia's and Ukraine's integration into NATO. The result of the alliance's emergency meeting on 19 August gave little encouragement to Georgia's aspirations; but it is quite probable that in seeking an effective response to Moscow's Georgia challenge, NATO member states may agree to push for another round of enlargement of the alliance.¹⁴ In fact it is likely that Moscow has mobilized international forces that will be difficult to contain. Russia's actions have cemented an alliance among the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine that is likely to develop further. This alliance will form a powerful force for action within the EU and NATO.

¹² "Medvedev Promises Georgia Enclaves Protection," *The New York Times*, 17 September, 2008.

¹³ See: "Rubliu pozvoleny kursovye slabosti," *Kommersant*, Russia's daily online, 8 September, 2008.

¹⁴ See: I. Krastev, "Russia and the Georgia War: The Great-Power Trap," 31 August, 2008, available at [<http://www.opendemocracy.net>].

And in Western Europe and North America the war has helped many people to make up their minds about the nature of the regime in the Kremlin.¹⁵

Moreover, the most important part of the resolution adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on 2 October (PACE was the first international parliamentary body to openly talk about this topic.—*K.K.*) acknowledged instances of ethnic cleansing in the occupied territories of Georgia. The parliamentarians expressed concern about the “credible reports of acts of ethnic cleansing committed in ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia and the ‘buffer zone’ by irregular militia and gangs which the Russian troops failed to stop,” reads the report.¹⁶ The Assembly also called on Russia to withdraw its recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to give EU and OSCE monitors access to both territories. It said that these, as well as full implementation of the EU-brokered ceasefire agreement, were the “minimum conditions” for a meaningful dialog.

The Russian leaders have now realized that their country has come out of the war far more damaged than Georgia did. That is because it was outfought on the battlefield on which most modern wars are now decided, in the media. In traditional military terms, Russia won that war easily, rolling over the Georgian army and seizing territory. However, Russia’s defeat in the information war has cost it considerably. Its global strategic position has been undermined, its adversaries are more firmly united, its friends are not quite so friendly, and its economy has suffered. Russia’s military victory in the war in Georgia may thus ultimately inflict more damage on Russia’s strategic interests in the region than Russia’s political defeat in the brief era of the Color Revolutions.

Consequences of the War

Russia’s invasion and wish to reestablish a 19th-century-style sphere of influence (in the former Soviet Union), using force if necessary, proved that Moscow had failed to accomplish its political objectives in the Southern Caucasus without recourse to the ultimate instrument of power, war. The war, moreover, destroyed much of what remained of Western illusions about Russia.¹⁷

Moscow’s pretext that it was “intervening” in Georgia to protect Russian “citizens” and “peace-keepers” in South Ossetia was simply false. It was soon revealed that the real goal of Russia’s military operation was to eliminate Georgia’s democratically elected government and to redraw Georgia’s borders. Moreover, in the midst of its attack in South Ossetia, Russia launched a concurrent military assault, in cooperation with Abkhazian separatist forces, on Georgian positions in the Upper Kodori Valley. By so doing, Russia violated every existing international agreement relating to Abkhazia, including the 1994 Moscow Agreement, as well as the letter and spirit of the documents and discussions associated with the U.N. Friends process, including numerous U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In practice and in strictly geopolitical terms, Russia’s recognition of the two territories may not change much in Georgia. Russia already had almost full control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia and dealt openly with its self-proclaimed presidents. Moscow’s recognition of Abkhazia’s and South

¹⁵ See: S.E. Cornell, “War in Georgia, Jitters All Around,” *Current History*, Vol. 107, No. 711, October 2008, p. 314.

¹⁶ PACE Calls for Independent International Investigation into the War between Georgia and Russia, available at [<http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Press/StopPressView.asp?ID=2085>].

¹⁷ See: S.E. Cornell, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

Ossetia's independence did nothing to resolve the task of defining the status of these territories, in fact it postponed it. Few countries will follow Russia's recognition.

However, what actually changed after 8 August is the real *world order*. After the August crisis Russia's emergence as an imperial power that is trying to revert to the Cold War tactics of intimidating its neighbors is an undeniable fact. This is especially true after Russian President Medvedev set forth the five principles of Russia's foreign policy, including its readiness to abide by international law and the claim of special interests in specific areas around the globe. Russia's claims of a "privileged" sphere of influence within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union, along with the declaration of the right to intervene on behalf of Russian citizens outside its borders, have drawn expressions of confusion, dismay, and outright rejection in international society. Many experts believe that this move by Russia may lead to new *world disorder*.

After Russia's aggression there are a few important and far-reaching results that must be taken into account by the international community. The first thing at stake after the conflict is the fundamental principle of the inviolability of borders. This is a fundamental principle of European and world security that is directly related to the Helsinki Final Act which clearly states that there should be no change of borders in Europe by use of force and that any change of borders may only be accomplished through negotiations.

So the forceful change of borders the world witnessed during the large-scale military invasion of Georgia, followed by recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence, is a real threat to international security. And recognition of these states' independence, which is clearly a change of borders based on the fact of occupation and invasion, is an obvious infringement of this principle. If today we all allow this precedent to take place and if Georgia's borders can be changed by the use of force, which has obviously happened, the question urgently arises of how this concept will develop in the future and who might be the next victim? Because if something like it is allowed once, it is like opening Pandora's Box and no one knows where it will stop.

Another fundamental issue at stake here is human rights. What happened in South Ossetia showed and confirmed instances of ethnic cleansing and large-scale violence against Georgian villages and the Georgian population in South Ossetia. That was partly conducted by Russian military forces; mostly it was done by paramilitaries, irregulars, and so-called militias acting in cooperation with the Russians. And the fact that it was not conducted physically by regular Russian troops does not remove the responsibility from Russia because, according to international law, the force that temporarily occupies part of another country's territory is responsible for protecting law and order and protecting the lives and human rights of the people on the territory it occupies. In addition to us, a number of international organizations confirming and providing evidence of the gross violation of human rights also have thousands of eyewitnesses talking about the ethnic cleansing conducted in the Georgian villages of South Ossetia.

Russia's actions in Georgia also contradict a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions which explicitly recognize Georgia's territorial integrity, including UNSCR 1080, which was passed as recently as April 2008 with Russia's consent.¹⁸ The Kremlin's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may also have unpredictable consequences for Russia's Northern Caucasus. Russia has bolstered separatism in Georgia but crushed it brutally in Chechnia. Chechnia may be too exhausted to fight another war with Russia at present, but in ten years' time the question of Chechnia's independence will arise again. In the future, after Russia's possible destabilization, Georgia may retaliate by recognizing any potential Russian separatist republic, which might be an invitation to "Balkanize" Russia.

¹⁸ See: U.N. Security Council Resolution 1808 (2008), available at [http://www.unomig.org/data/file/973/080415_SC_resolution_eng.pdf].

It is very clear that Russia has not achieved its objectives. Georgia's juvenile democracy is standing. It is thriving. It is receiving extraordinary international support. Russia's invasion of the country resulted in the absolute alienation of the Georgian population from Russia and, according to sober judgments, it will require enormous efforts from the next few generations to repair this damage. Moreover, after the Russian invasion Georgia was forced to leave the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was the last post-Soviet structure it was associated with. Thus, by forcing Georgia out of the CIS, Russia lost its legal levers and influence over Georgia exacerbated by suspending the diplomatic links between the two countries.

Sovereignty is the key concept underlying the existing international system, bringing with it the legal and political rights to decide all matters within the boundaries of a state and to be free from external interference in domestic affairs. Inherent in this definition are freedom from the use of force and respect for territorial integrity. This concept has been at the heart of the evolving international system since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. However, Moscow's recognition of Georgia's separatist entities as independent is surely a challenge to the Westphalian principles and may be a prelude to their incorporation, sooner or later, into the Russian Federation, which in turn might set a very dangerous precedent in today's international system.

C o n c l u s i o n

Russia's leaders have made an unforgivable mistake that could lead to further escalation of tension in the Caucasus and the world in general. The "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will not be recognized by anyone other than Russia and, possibly, two or three marginal dictatorial regimes. Thus, the Abkhaz and South Ossetian people are doomed to many years of miserable life without a real international legal status. After many years of isolation, they will probably have to return to negotiations about reunifying with Georgia, as happened with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which was not recognized by anyone other than Turkey.

Moreover, this conflict has set a very hazardous precedent for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation itself, which could foment its disintegration in the near future. By recognizing the independence of its "own citizens" (as Russia claims) in the two Georgian enclaves, Russia, for the first time in its imperial history, is setting a precedent by granting independence to its passport holders. As world history shows such events never go unnoticed and one does not need to be fortune-teller to claim that this precedent may lead to the "Balkanization" of Russia's multiethnic regions starting with Tatarstan and ending with the Northern Caucasus. Henceforth it will be a difficult dilemma for any government in Russia to convince its own citizens that Tatarstan or other republics like Ingushetia cannot be allowed to become independent states.

Russia's rulers have shown their real face, shown that they themselves do not in fact respect international law, including their own obligations (in particular, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1808 of 15 April, 2008, in which Russia once again confirmed its recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity), using criticism of the war in Iraq or the West's recognition of Kosovo only as a pretext for carrying out anti-Western foreign policy. As a result of its actions, Russia's leadership has lost the moral basis for criticizing the actions of other nations that have violated international law. By justifying its assault on Georgia in August, Russia has attempted to echo NATO's military campaign to halt the systematic ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians with its own campaign based on charges of the atrocities committed by Georgian forces — charges now shown to be without foundation.

After the military aggression against Georgia the international community is witnessing a sharp deterioration in Russia's international position. As a result Russia has finally lost the image of "peace-keeper" and facilitator and will probably never be allowed to act in this position. As Joseph Nye of

Harvard's Kennedy School of Government said, "by humiliating the Georgians, they (the Russians) raised widespread fears and were unable to generate diplomatic backing."¹⁹ This military operation has imposed a serious price on Russia in terms of its standing in the world.

A further worrisome implication of this war is that after its military adventure in Georgia the Russian leadership wants to convince the world that it defeated not only Georgia but also the U.S. and the West in general. It is using U.S. policy as a threat to justify its deeds in Georgia, as was the case during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and Hungary during the Cold War. Russia must decide how it wants to define its future relations with the international community. Russia's attempts to cite Kosovo as a precedent for its military actions in Georgia are both misleading and unsupported by even a cursory examination of the facts.

Any attempt by Russia to install a pro-Russian government in Tbilisi is futile. Russia's leadership should understand that there has been a generational and mental change in Georgian society over the last 15 years. The Soviet stereotype of Georgians mostly generated by popular Soviet movies like "Mimino" is not valid in present Georgia. Unlike other former Soviet republics Georgian society not dominated by a "Soviet nomenklatura" who might have the tendency to be pro-Russian. On the contrary, this layer of Georgian society had been marginalized a long time ago and they have no role and future in Georgia's political life.

Georgia's present-day elite consists of educated Western people who saw nothing good in Russia's policy toward Georgia and thus regards Russia as adversary number one and Russian imperialism as a direct threat to Georgia's national security. Most of them grew up with anti-Russian sentiments and perceive the Russo-Georgian confrontation in ideological terms, i.e. authoritarian and imperial Russia vs. pro-western and democratic Georgia. The present Georgian political spectrum is dominated by this tendency. In these circumstances the Kremlin's hope for a "regime change," by installing a leader in Georgia who is more amenable to Moscow, is counterproductive. No one in Georgia will support Georgia's geopolitical reorientation toward Russia, since it is perceived as betrayal of the country's vital national interests. Unlike other post-Soviet republics where Russia enjoys great support from the former "nomenklatura" the Kremlin cannot win the minds and souls of the Georgians and so cannot win an "ideological battle" in Georgia.

Meanwhile the international community should realize that this war was not about South Ossetia, Abkhazia, or Georgia. It runs far wider and deeper than the immediate issues surrounding Georgia's territorial integrity and political autonomy. The Georgian crisis is in fact a dramatic new manifestation of the longer-term trends underlying the erosion of democracy in the post-communist region. It should also be noted that for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has demonstrated that it is able and willing to use force outside its borders in order to defend its national interests. This leaves neighboring countries faced with the question of how to ensure their own security. In the case of Georgia this is still a pending question.

The next fundamental thing at stake as the result of the Russian invasion is the concept of security itself because the biggest lesson Europe learned during and before World War II was that security is an indivisible concept. The only way to guarantee security is to guarantee the security of every state, including small states. And the concept of spheres of influence, buffer zones, and buffer states only generates instability and only encourages aggressor countries to act further.

So by introducing this concept of spheres of influence and buffer zones (today we are witnessing numerous discussions in Russia about the buffer zones in and around Georgia and about the buffer zones between Russia and NATO), Russia is suggesting that one of the roles Georgia might play is that of a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. By introducing this concept of influence, spheres of

¹⁹ Russia's Use of Kosovo Analogy for Georgia False. The United States Mission to the European Union, available at [<http://useu.usmission.gov/Article.asp?ID=02C7FBF6-0AA9-471B-9126-17F13B15B>].

influence, and buffer zones, Russia is actually challenging the very basics of European security, i.e. that security is indivisible and that security is not and cannot be based on the concept of areas of influence and buffer zones. So this is actually a major setback for the European security concept, which takes this concept back to the beginning of 20th century. It is also posing a major challenge for the Europeans with respect to how to deal with this approach.

It is a challenge—it is a challenge not only for Georgia as an immediate victim of what happened, it is also a challenge for the international community because if the international community fails to make a proper response Georgia will merely be the first step in this journey and some other countries may follow. So the question is where will such things end if they are not handled in the proper way? And it seems that unless this situation is handled properly, it will not end. And the price to be paid tomorrow will be much higher than price being paid today.