

# CURRENT HISTORY

October 2008

*“Moscow’s ambitions... directly undermine the entire European project of peace, freedom, and prosperity.”*

## War in Georgia, Jitters All Around

SVANTE E. CORNELL

Near midnight on August 8, a column of several hundred Russian tanks rolled through the Roki Tunnel, which connects Russia to Georgia’s breakaway province of South Ossetia. This action represented Russia’s first military attack on another state since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979—hence, it was an event whose significance extended far beyond the South Caucasus. Indeed, while the humanitarian consequences of the war that ensued in Georgia do not compare with what transpired in Chechnya (or Bosnia) in the 1990s, the conflict arguably marked the most significant challenge to Europe’s security architecture since the end of the cold war.

Within 10 days, Russian troops had taken control of South Ossetia and started a second front in Georgia’s other separatist region, Abkhazia. And they had also intruded deep into non-contested Georgia, moving on the towns of Gori, Poti, Zugdidi, and Senaki. Military and civilian infrastructure had been bombed across Georgia, as had the railway connecting the eastern and western parts of the country. Even the prized Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park was in flames on account of Russian firebombing.

Russia’s invasion was a surprise—but only in terms of its scope and brutality. For months if not years, Russia had been pressuring Georgia in various ways, singling it out among countries in the region for particularly aggressive treatment. This spring, several analysts predicted a war would take place, some even timing it to August. Yet Western leaders were caught unaware, and appeared unable or unwilling to respond meaning-

fully to Russia’s attack. Why did this small war in the Caucasus happen, and who started it? What implications will it have for the South Caucasus, for the former Soviet Union more broadly, and for Europe as a whole?

### CAUCASIAN EMPOWERMENT

In recent years, the nations of the South Caucasus have made some of the most remarkable progress that has been seen anywhere in the post-Soviet space. This comes in stark contrast to these countries’ first decade of independence, during the 1990s, when debilitating ethnic wars, political instability, and economic collapse made a shambles of the region. In that era Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a vicious war, and Georgia was torn apart as the two northern autonomous regions effectively seceded with Russian help. Afterwards, these conflicts remained unresolved, and the West ignored them despite the peril in doing so.

The war and destruction of the 1990s make the progress of recent years all the more remarkable. The region’s states have hardly become model democracies. They remain afflicted by widespread corruption and by a constant tug-of-war between authoritarian and democratic forces that are fighting for influence both in government and in opposition groups. But the region’s three countries—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—have, in fact, become real states.

Of the three, Georgia has achieved the most impressive transformation. At the start of the current decade the central government—controlled by aging former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze—had failed to gain real control over territories outside the capital’s immediate vicinity, let alone the breakaway regions. Georgia was known as a failing state. But in 2003, the “young reformers” whom Shevardnadze had cultivated turned into an opposition and carried out

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the peaceful “Rose Revolution.” With a reformist zeal previously seen nowhere in the former Soviet Union except the Baltic States, a government led by President Mikheil Saakashvili turned Georgia around. Petty corruption was effectively eliminated; Soviet-era practices were thrown out and institutions revamped; and the tax system was rebuilt. Georgia’s budget quadrupled and the country became solvent again.

But the state’s newfound successes ruffled feathers in Georgia. The flamboyant Saakashvili’s government sometimes appeared arrogant, and lacked sensitivity regarding the adverse effects of its policies. In November 2007, street protests organized by opposition groups funded by a shady oligarch, along with a subsequent crackdown, harmed the government’s legitimacy. But the government survived this crisis. Most of the legitimacy was restored, moreover, when early elections were held, and were judged by international observers mostly free and fair. Saakashvili was reelected with 52 percent of the vote, more than double the share of his closest opponent, and in parliamentary elections the ruling party maintained control. While Georgia still has much work ahead of it in terms of building institutions, the rule of law, and a fully democratic political culture, one struggles to identify a country anywhere that has experienced as rapid a turnaround as Georgia has in the past decade.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have also experienced some success, though it has occurred along different trajectories from Georgia’s. In Azerbaijan, the astute diplomacy of Heydar Aliyev, the country’s returned Soviet-era leader, brought billions of dollars of investment in the country’s rich Caspian oilfields in the 1990s, along with stability. Aliyev also succeeded in securing a Western export route for the country’s oil—the US-supported Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which was completed in 2005.

In 2003, Aliyev handed power to his son, Ilham. The latter, a progressive man with an acute understanding of market economics, presides over a stable and rapidly growing country. But he has had to deal with the first signs of “Dutch disease” (a decline in other economic sectors corresponding with the dominance of energy exports) and a government run to a large extent by the oligarchs of his father’s tenure. They, whose positions in power are entrenched enough to bring to mind feudal barons, limit his scope of action and his ability to reform the country.

Armenia, which lacks Azerbaijan’s oil fields and has not experienced a revolution like Georgia’s, lost almost half its population to emigration in the 1990s. Moreover, most regional infrastructural projects bypassed Armenia because of its war with Azerbaijan, which lasted from 1988 to 1994. Thanks to serious reforms, Armenia has managed to make its economy a success story, with double-digit growth rates characterizing the past decade. Yet the country’s political system has remained sclerotic. It is dominated by a crop of politicians whose fortunes were linked to the war over the ethnic enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in southwestern Azerbaijan, from which Armenia’s current leaders hail.

All three countries, in short, have their problems, the largest of which are unresolved territorial conflicts. But the past decade has seen the nations evolve into functioning states with a capacity to formulate and implement policies. Paradoxically, this strengthening of statehood is what has caused the region’s unresolved conflicts to reemerge on the world agenda. The leaders of Azerbaijan and Georgia, with their renewed strength and capacities, resolved to reverse the humiliating defeats and losses of territory that their countries suffered in the 1990s, thus rejecting a status quo to which the international community had grown accustomed.

## STATUS QUO NO LONGER

Indeed, Baku and Tbilisi became anti-status quo powers, calling into question weak international mechanisms for conflict resolution and investing a substantial share of their growing national wealth in their military budgets. This explains some of the recent bewilderment of European powers that were suddenly asked, despite their having to juggle dozens of other concerns, to address conflicts in a distant neighborhood that they understood poorly. But most of all, it explains Russia’s increasingly assertive interference in the conflicts—especially those in Georgia.

When Saakashvili came to power in Georgia in early 2004, he immediately raised the Council of Europe’s flag beside Georgia’s in front of the national parliament. Of course, the Council of Europe’s flag is identical to that of the European Union—12 stars on a deep blue background—so flying it was a powerful statement of Georgia’s European aspirations. Not long afterwards, Saakashvili declared Georgia’s intention to seek NATO membership. Shevardnadze before him had ex-

pressed such desires; but because of Saakashvili's furious pace of reform, this was a bid for membership that could not simply be laughed away. Saakashvili saw his country following in the footsteps of Central and Eastern European countries that were, just as he gained power, being admitted to NATO and the EU.

Europe, however, was developing a serious case of enlargement fatigue—and with EU efforts to reform an ungovernable union of 27 members already foundering, it was developing internal difficulties as well. More ominously than this, the Russia of 2005 was not the Russia of 1995. No longer dependent on Western loans, Russia was now buoyed by an oil windfall and was in the midst of a self-aggrandizing effort to restore its great power status.

The country's president, Vladimir Putin, was determined to roll back the "color revolutions" that had brought pro-Western leaders to power in Tbilisi and Kiev, and which had put Georgia and Ukraine on a trajectory toward NATO membership. Putin saw these trends as a direct result of Moscow's weakness in the 1990s, and he thought displays of Russian strength were needed. Nowhere has Moscow's readiness to flex its muscles been clearer than in Georgia.

Initially, Moscow was put on the defensive by Georgia's increasingly assertive steps to achieve progress regarding its unresolved territorial conflicts. Georgia's efforts in 2004 to curtail widespread smuggling of drugs, untaxed cigarettes, and other contraband across South Ossetia led to a serious skirmish with the separatists. In 2006, Georgia took control of the mountainous Kodori Gorge in upper Abkhazia, which had been dominated by a local warlord.

These measures were seen as militaristic, but Tbilisi also made a series of political and economic proposals to the separatist leaderships, and sought greater international participation in the processes of conflict resolution. Georgia reversed its earlier policies of isolating the unrecognized republics, seeking instead to engage them economically and win their hearts by presenting a renewed association with Georgia as a path to Europe. Thus, Tbilisi's policies included a mix of carrots and sticks. This mix, however, never gained coherence.

From Moscow's vantage point, Georgia's assertiveness and success were the chief regional threats to the emerging "Putin doctrine"—according to which Russia would resume its domination and control over the states of the former Soviet Union. Indeed, the Kremlin saw Georgia's revolution as having inspired the Ukrainian revolution the next year and potentially beginning a wave of democratic revolutions that would bring Western-oriented leaders to power throughout the post-Soviet world. This would clearly be an obstacle to Putin's ambitions of restoring Moscow's empire, and eventually a threat to the power of the authoritarian kleptocracy in the Kremlin.

### PEACEKEEPING RUSSIAN-STYLE

Moscow's response to Georgia's actions was gradual but strong, and included a set of instruments to which no other former Soviet state had been exposed. First, Russia undermined Georgia's statehood and independence by intervening more boldly than before in the unresolved civil

wars that Moscow itself had helped instigate. Even before Saakashvili came to power, Russia had imposed a discriminatory visa regime on Georgia, requiring visas of Georgians but exempting residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Subsequently, Moscow

began to distribute Russian passports en masse to the populations of these two regions, in violation of international law.

This was followed by a claim that Russia had a right to defend its citizens abroad, through military means if necessary—which turned out to be exactly the pretext Russia used when it invaded Georgia. Not stopping at this, Russia's political leadership began floating the possibility of annexing Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Meanwhile, Moscow staunchly resisted all efforts to internationalize mediation, negotiation, and peacekeeping in the conflict zones.

Facing little international reaction to these aggressive moves, Moscow by 2004 essentially dropped any pretense of neutrality in the Georgian conflicts. It began appointing Russian officials to the military and security services of the breakaway regions' self-styled governments. Hence Russian general Sultan Sosnaliev served as Abkhazia's defense minister. Likewise, South Os-

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setia's defense minister, Major General Vasily Lunev (former commander of the Siberian military district), and its security chief, Anatoly Barankevich, were among several Russian military officers in that breakaway republic's government.

These moves made a mockery of Russia's claim to playing a peacekeeping and mediation role in the conflicts, as well as of any pretense that the separatist governments operated independently from Moscow. Yet these blatant interventions within Georgian territory were at most obliquely criticized by Western leaders, who did nothing to seek a transformation of the negotiation mechanisms, let alone of the peacekeeping forces.

Moscow also exercised economic instruments of policy. In 2006, coinciding with the Russian-Ukrainian energy crisis, energy supplies from Russia to Georgia were cut off after mysterious explosions on Russian territory destroyed the pipelines and power lines that carried gas and electricity to Georgia. Only months later, Russia imposed a total ban on imports of Georgian and Moldovan wine, citing bogus quality concerns (Russia consumed about 80 percent of both countries' wine exports). In September 2006, after Georgia arrested several alleged Russian spies, a full embargo was imposed—all transport, trade, and postage links with Georgia were ended. Georgians living in Russia were systematically harassed.

In 2007, Moscow escalated its policies to include military provocation. In March of that year, Russian attack helicopters shelled administrative buildings in the Kodori Gorge, while on August 6—a year to the day before the descent to war in 2008—a Russian aircraft attacked a Georgian radar station near South Ossetia. When a bomb that was dropped failed to explode, international investigators were able to prove its Russian origin. But Western leaders, mostly on summer vacation, took days to formulate a response, and when it came it turned out to be soft-spoken. By 2008, Putin had explicitly linked the conflicts in Georgia to the forthcoming Western recognition of Kosovo's independence.

On April 16, 2008, Putin signed a decree instructing his government agencies to open direct trade, transportation, and political ties to Georgia's separatist republics, and to open offices there. He then dispatched several hundred paratroopers as

well as heavy artillery into Abkhazia—according to Moscow, as part of its peacekeeping operation. Utilizing troops to repair the railroad linking Russia and Abkhazia may have seemed an oddity, but repairs were completed on July 30. Thousands of Russian troops and hundreds of tanks sped down the line 10 days later, opening an entirely unprovoked second front to the war that had just started in South Ossetia.

## RAISING THE HAMMER

By August 7, 2008, days of escalating shelling of Georgian posts and villages by Russia's South Ossetian proxies in the South Ossetian conflict zone had led the Georgian army to increase its deployment of troops there. What happened next is a matter of dispute. Russia claims its invasion began after Georgia indiscriminately shelled Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital; Georgia says it began an attack only after a Russian tank column had already crossed the Roki Tunnel into Georgian territory.

The way the war began provides key insights about Russian motivations, and therefore also about the war's broader implications.

The prevailing Western view is that Russia may have provoked Georgia, but that Saakashvili foolishly gave Moscow a pretext for intervention when he sent Georgian troops into Tskhinvali. While Westerners agree that Moscow's opportunistic invasion widely exceeded any legitimate right to action that Moscow may have had, there is also a sense that Saakashvili has himself to blame for starting a war with Russia. But closer analysis indicates that this explanation is at best simplistic. A growing body of evidence suggests that Russia was determined in any event to wage war with Georgia this summer.

During the spring and early summer of 2008 it was Abkhazia, not South Ossetia, that was the scene of rising tensions—and in fact it is likely that Moscow planned to begin its war there. In the spring, statements by Russian and Abkhaz leaders regarding the Kodori Gorge grew increasingly belligerent, involving veiled threats to take control of this Georgian-administered region by force unless Georgia withdrew. Moreover, when Georgia sent unarmed drones over Abkhazia to monitor Russian troop movements, the Russian air force shot them down. One such incident was dramatically

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captured on camera. In late June, a leading Russian military analyst, Pavel Felgenhauer, said the Russian leadership had in April made the political decision to attack Georgia by August.

All these developments contributed to a growing sense of panic in Tbilisi. For years, Western partners had told the young Georgian leadership to stay calm in the face of escalating Russian assertiveness, and to stick to existing peacekeeping structures in spite of any flaws. The term “exercise restraint,” so dear to Western leaders, became a standing joke in Tbilisi.

Indeed, the West’s lame response to Putin’s April 16 decree and the August 6 missile attack led Georgians to conclude that no one would check Moscow’s now overt territorial claims, and that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were likely being lost, perhaps irreversibly. Seeing this, the more hawkish members of Saakashvili’s entourage contemplated a military option. Yet the president himself and the majority of his government saw the futility of military action, instead accelerating efforts to encourage a stronger Western diplomatic response.

In late July, tensions suddenly shifted to South Ossetia, which differs in two important respects from Abkhazia. Whereas in Abkhazia a clear front line along the Inguri River separated Georgian from Abkhaz forces, South Ossetia was a patchwork of Georgian and Ossetian villages under the respective control of the Georgian government and the Russian-backed separatists, with each side controlling about half of the territory. Second, while Abkhazia’s elite maintained a modicum of distance from Russia, the South Ossetian leaders answered to Moscow rather than to their own people.

Following a July 3 attempt on the life of Dmitry Sanakoyev, a leading pro-Georgian official in the

territory, tensions escalated. South Ossetian forces started shelling Georgian posts and villages, which elicited fire from Georgian forces. Russian jets also conducted overflights of South Ossetia, and unlike on previous occasions, did not bother to deny these violations of Georgian airspace.

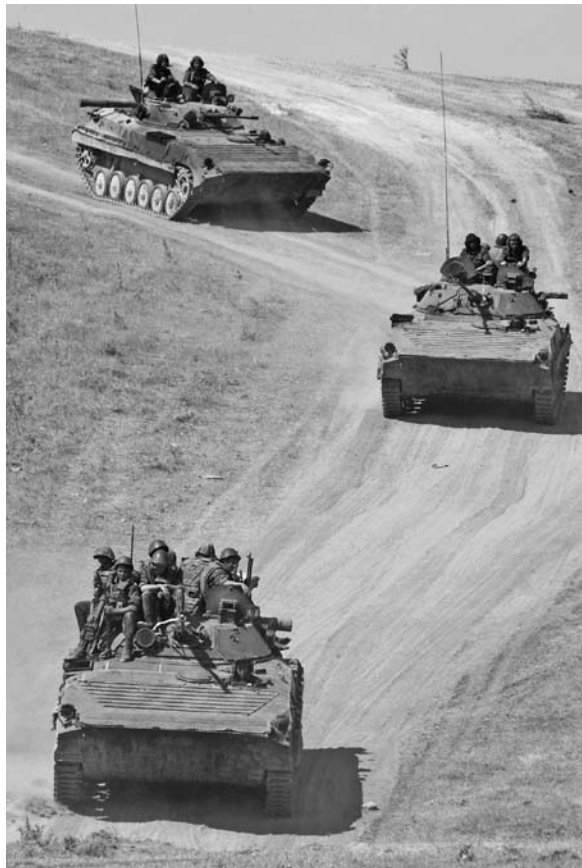
Across the mountains in the North Caucasus, Russia used the summer months to finalize an impressive military buildup. Starting on July 15, Russia conducted a major military exercise dubbed “Kavkaz-2008.” When the exercise ended on August 2, the troops involved did not return to their barracks—though some of them had come from posts in faraway Pskov and Novorossiysk. They remained on alert in North Ossetia, just across the border from Georgia. The Black Sea fleet, based in Sevastopol, was meanwhile made ready for military action.

### STRIKING THE BLOW

There is little dispute that on the late evening of August 7 Georgian forces began an attack on Tskhinvali. Russia claims it sent “additional forces” into South Ossetia only on the afternoon of August 8. But the Georgian forces, which had taken control of most of the city overnight, were pushed back at noon of that day by Russian artillery and air attacks. To carry out such an offensive by mid-day, Russian forces

would have had to begin moving from their bases in North Ossetia on the evening of the previous day, at the very latest. In other words, whether the Russian tank column reached Georgian territory before or after the Georgian forces began their attack on Tskhinvali, the order to send troops across the border must have been given before Georgia began its attack.

That Moscow’s invasion of Georgia was premeditated is also borne out by the extremely rapid and coordinated deployment to Georgia’s



#### Remember us?

Russia reintroduces itself to Georgia

Black Sea coast of the Black Sea fleet and by air force bombardments of Georgia's interior; as well as by the fact that a second front in Abkhazia was opened the very next day, followed by the landing in Abkhazia of over 6,000 troops by sea and railroad.

Saakashvili can certainly be blamed for the limited shelling of civilian areas that the Georgian military apparently committed (which even Saakashvili's supporters strongly deplore). Yet it is also clear that Russia intentionally inflated that assault's magnitude, claiming that more than 2,000 civilians had been killed though only about 100 deaths could be independently confirmed. In fact, most of the destruction in Tskhinvali was caused by Russia's air attack on Georgian positions. Beyond that, the only thing Saakashvili might be blamed for is falling into a trap that Russia had prepared for months.

If, however, one accepts the premise that the Georgian advance took place against the imminent threat of a Russian army column moving toward the region, a compelling military logic justifies taking Tskhinvali. The city sits like a cork in a bottle: Had Russian troops been able to continue down the mountain roads to Tskhinvali, they could easily have moved from there toward Gori and even Tbilisi in a matter of hours, if that was their intention. By forcing Moscow to fight for Tskhinvali, the Georgian army—albeit at a devastating price—probably slowed the invasion by 48 hours. This gave Europe and America time to wake up, and perhaps saved the country's capital from occupation.

## WHAT MOSCOW WANTS

Russia's invasion of Georgia in any case had little to do with South Ossetia. The aims were larger and strategic, and they reached well beyond Georgia. But as far as Georgia was concerned, Russia's invasion sought to punish Saakashvili's government for its Western orientation and its obstinate refusal to yield to Russian pressure. The Kremlin's ambition was in all likelihood to ensure the downfall of a president whom Putin is known to hate viscerally.

While that ambition was not met, at least in the short term, Moscow succeeded in crippling Georgia's military capacity and in dealing a devastating blow to the country's economy and infrastructure. Indeed, the war was a disaster for an economy largely dependent on growing Western investment.

Moscow's refusal to withdraw from Georgia, and its establishment of occupation zones deep in Georgian territory that threaten key transportation arteries, all indicate that the purpose of the invasion was to negate Georgia's independence and to reduce the country to a pliant satellite. The war was also obviously aimed at killing Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. It capitalized on the assumption that European states would never seek to integrate a country that is partly occupied by Russian forces.

On a regional level, the war served to restore Moscow's control over the South Caucasus—a geopolitically crucial region with a unique position between Russia and Iran, and one that links the Black and Caspian seas. The Caucasian isthmus forms the access route between the West and Central Asia, enabling the transportation of Caspian oil to the West and providing NATO with a logistical link from Europe to its operations in Afghanistan (practically all flights between NATO territory and Afghanistan cross Georgian and Azerbaijani airspace). As such, the war indirectly targeted Azerbaijan's independence as much as Georgia's.

While oil-rich Azerbaijan has sought to maintain working relations with both Moscow and Tehran, there has been no doubt that the country's economic and strategic orientation has been toward the West. Indeed, Azerbaijan and Georgia are tightly connected—to the extent that they have come to be understood as a tandem that either stands or falls together. Without access to the West through Georgia, Azerbaijan loses its outlet for oil exports, and is also separated from Turkey, its closest ally. And without Azerbaijan, Georgia's strategic importance would be much reduced. The weak Western response to Russia's invasion of Georgia puts Azerbaijan in a quandary. While Moscow's actions undermine all that Baku has been working for in the past decade, the country cannot speak out too loudly, for fear it might be next to experience Moscow's wrath.

Moscow's war has broader significance, too, for the Caspian energy game. Moscow resented the building of twin oil and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan to Turkey across Georgia. While Russia has not yet directly attacked these pipelines, it has certainly sought to increase prohibitively the political risk of building any further pipelines along the same route—most specifically, the EU-championed Nabucco project, which would connect Turkmen or Kazakh reserves to Europe via the South Caucasus energy corridor.

Moscow has thus dealt a further blow to Europe's attempts to diversify its energy imports and may have effectively ended any notions that Central Asian leaders had entertained about a Western export option.

But the country most on Moscow's mind when it invaded Georgia, other than Georgia itself, was probably Ukraine. Like Georgia, Ukraine is a candidate for NATO membership, but Russian elites see Ukraine as a historic part of Russia and not a separate nation. At NATO's April 2008 Bucharest summit, Putin even warned US President George W. Bush that if Ukraine entered NATO it would be dismembered.

Also ominously, Russia since the spring of this year has been making more emphatic claims to the Crimean peninsula—not coincidentally home to Russia's Black Sea fleet. As it had in Georgia's breakaway regions, Russia has begun massive distributions of Russian passports to residents of the Crimea, many of whom are ethnic Russians. And territorial claims by leading official and semi-official Russian figures on the peninsula have grown significantly. It is little surprise that Ukrainian leaders fear they will now have to choose between accepting a role as a Russian satellite or pressing on with a Western-oriented foreign policy—at the risk of meeting a fate similar to Georgia's.

Finally, Russia's aggression against Georgia sent a strong message to the West: that the South Caucasus and the entire former Soviet Union are parts of Moscow's exclusive sphere of influence, and the West should stay out. As such, Russia clearly indicated its desire to return to a cold war–style division of Europe into spheres of influence. Russia thus is mounting the largest challenge since the end of the cold war to the norms and principles of European security.

If Russia achieves its aims, Europe will become a place where whole nations are denied their sovereign right to run their own affairs and are instead subjugated to Russian control, regardless of their own national interests. Democracy would be impossible to maintain in areas under Russian domination because, as during Soviet times, Russia has failed to become a force of attraction and can only dominate its neighbors through intimidation. Moscow's ambitions therefore directly undermine the entire European project of peace,

freedom, and prosperity as embodied by the European Union. And it is unclear at this juncture how far Moscow's ambitions extend: Does Russia wish to dominate even the Baltic states and Poland, despite their membership in NATO and the EU?

## MIGHT, MIGHT NOT

Whether Russia will succeed in its ambitions—in terms of achieving domination over Georgia, the South Caucasus, and the broader post-Soviet world, as well as in terms of changing the character of European security—will depend to a great degree on the West's ability to react correctly to the challenge. Unfortunately, the West's response in the weeks following the invasion was not encouraging, as Western leaders seemed taken aback by events and unable to find instruments to confront them.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, serving also as EU president, did react rapidly to secure a cease-fire. But rather than mustering unity within the EU and seeing the agreement through to implementation, Sarkozy simply congratulated himself

on a mission accomplished when, in fact, Russia had showed little if any inclination to respect its commitments. NATO was similarly muted, managing to gather only enough courage to say that “business as usual”

with Russia would not be possible under these circumstances. European states in the EU and NATO remained divided on whether to move more assertively to punish Russia, with eastern members strongly supporting such plans and southern ones displaying more reluctance.

In the United States, which had invested tremendous prestige and political capital in Georgia, the Bush administration took several days to realize the magnitude of the crisis and to formulate a response—which primarily consisted of tough rhetoric. America did act by rapidly airlifting Georgian soldiers home from Iraq, where they had represented the third-largest foreign contingent of troops—a remarkable fact for a country of less than 5 million people. Washington also promised aid amounting to 1 billion dollars. But the initial Western reaction failed to attach any concrete cost to Russia's aggressive behavior—just as the West had offered only verbal, not substantive, reactions on the other occasions in recent years when Russia had acted provocatively against its neighbors.

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With Europe divided and America overcommitted around the world, will Russia succeed in its effort to reestablish dominance in the post-Soviet space? This is by no means certain. In fact, while Russian success in this project is an entirely plausible outcome, so is failure. While Moscow's invasion of its southern neighbor is a sign of might, it is not necessarily a sign of strength. Indeed, it exposes several ways in which Russia may be weak.

First, Russia's invasion proved that Moscow had failed to accomplish its political objectives in the South Caucasus without recourse to the ultimate instrument of power, war. The war, moreover, destroyed much of what remained of Western illusions about Russia.

Second, the fact that Russia's first foreign military adventure since 1979 took place at a time of murky "cohabitation" between now-Prime Minister Putin and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev may not be a coincidence. Russia's military adventures in its borderlands have often been related to domestic politics—indeed, the 1999 war in Chechnya was what brought Putin to power. Was the war in Georgia intended to secure Putin's control over Russia's foreign and security policies? If so, Russia is less stable than generally understood.

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

Given Europe's divisions, much of the burden of containing Russia will inevitably fall to the United States. As indicated by the strong reaction to the war by both US presidential candidates and by leading lawmakers from both parties, Georgia is a bipartisan issue in Washington. No matter who wins November's election, the next American president is unlikely to spend much time debating whether or not Russia is an ally, and will probably—unlike other recent presidents—pursue a much more forceful policy toward Russia and the post-Soviet space. In this sense, international reaction to Russia's military adventurism may prove to resemble a tsunami—slow, but massive in the end. Whether Western action will come in time to secure Georgia's freedom is another question. ■

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