

Georgia's Precarious Security

Stephen
Blank

Abstract

This article examines Georgia's current security environment. Georgia and Russia are at an impasse over the outcome of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and Russia's subsequent encroachments on Georgian sovereignty, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia suggest to Georgia that it is the threat of a new war or crisis remains. Meanwhile Moscow refuses to make any concessions to Georgia, and vice versa. The result is a stalemate, and a dangerous impasse in the negotiations to end the war and in their overall relations. This crisis has broader implications for the rest of the CIS and Europe due to Russia's continuing neo-imperialist policies. Indeed, Russia's formal policy and even military legislation give it the right to intervene across the CIS to defend its compatriots if it believes their honor and dignity have been harmed by a foreign state. The threat implicit in such legislation is obvious. Nonetheless, the West is not responding particularly strongly to Russia's activities, and Georgia is waiting for the West to help it make new gains in security and in recovering its territory.

Accordingly the article concludes with recommendations for Georgia as to what it must do to strengthen its national security and achieve its vital goals of inclusion in the EU and NATO

** Professor Stephen Blank is Research Professor of National Security Affairs at US Army War College, views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Department, or the US Government*

Three years after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, Georgia's security remains precarious and additionally burdened by a permanent sense of being under threat from Russia.¹ Moscow has sustained a cold war of provocations and counter-provocations against Georgia since 2004, interrupted only by the brief hot war in 2008, which resulted directly from those provocations.² Georgian elites believe that while a Russian-initiated war is not imminent, Moscow believes it has not conclusively settled its scores with Georgia and therefore keeps open the option of a further attack. Russia continues its campaign of subversion against Georgia, which is comprised of attempts to generate or co-opt domestic opposition to the Saakashvili regime, unceasing espionage, and even bombings near the American Embassy in Tbilisi.³ While this bombing may or may not also have targeted the US; it certainly aims to destabilize Georgia and influence US perceptions of its stability and reliability.⁴ This constant pres-

sure seems to be Moscow's general modus operandi in the former Soviet Union. Thus observers in Latvia concluded that:

We see several, interrelated short-term [Russian] strategies focusing on exercising ever-increasing influence in the politics of the target states. What we do not see is a policy of military conquest but, rather, a gradual but unswerving drive to eventually regain dominance over the social, economic, and political affairs of what are to become entirely dependent client states.⁵

Such activities show how much credence Russia puts in the Obama Administration's resolve and accompanying reset policy.

Meanwhile the Georgian government perceives Russia as 'enemy number one' and with good reason refuses to accept the legality of Moscow's assault on Georgian sovereignty: in 2008, Russia official recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. What this means for Georgia is that there is no legal basis for a peace settlement unless Russia repudiates that policy. Therefore Georgia's government has not even discussed how it might win back those rebellious provinces. Tbilisi's refusal to negotiate on Moscow's terms is

1 *International Crisis Group, Georgia-Russia: Learn to Live Like Neighbors, Europe Briefing No. 65, August 8, 2011*; Ghia Nodia, "Another Year Passes Without a New Russia-Georgian War, But Nothing Can Be Ruled Out," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, August 10, 2011; Moscow, "Tbilisi Suspects Russia of Preparing for War Against Georgia," *Interfax, in English*, August 9, 2011, *Open Source Center, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia, (Henceforth FBIS SOV)*, August 9, 2011

2 Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, Washington, D.C.: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2011, pp. 29-34, pp. 93-99; Eli Lake, "Russia Waged Covert War on Georgia Starting in '04," *Washington Times*, December 3, 2010, www.washingtontimes.com

3 *Georgia-Russia: Learn to Live Like Neighbours*

4 Michael Cecire, "U.S. Embassy Bombing a Plausible Escalation for Russia in Georgia," *World Politics Review*, August 7, 2011

5 Gundar J. King and David E. McNabb, "Crossroads Dynamics in Foreign Policy: The Case of Latvia," *Problems of Post-Communism*, LVI, NO. 3, May-June, 2009, p. 39

one reason for the deadlocked negotiations in Geneva. But that deadlock reinforces Georgia's unwillingness to present a credible strategy for addressing the Abkhaz and South Ossetian grievances that originally triggered the conflict. Consequently there is stalemate: Georgian domestic politics are paralyzed, as are relations between Georgia and Russia, and high levels of tension continue. The absence of any Russo-Georgian dialogue forces Georgia to rely on the West to influence Moscow, and reinforces its reluctance to open a dialogue with Moscow or its former provinces. This disinclination, however, leaves it vulnerable to criticism over what is perceived as passivity in terms of policy development.⁶

Russia, meanwhile, insists that the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is irreversible, along with the rejection of Georgian entry into NATO. It is also pushing for the recognition that Moscow has a special sphere of influence in the CIS where it can use force with impunity to protect its interests.⁷ Russian political analyst Boris Sokolov recently commented that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's remarks about Russia's potential incorporation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia - should those territo-

ries wish to be made part of Russia - suggest that the annexation of South Ossetia has not been excluded from Russia's agenda, that Moscow will not withdraw its troops from Georgia's provinces, and that neither the US nor the EU are making any real demands on Russia or putting pressure it to withdraw those forces and return to the status quo ante.⁸ Indeed, some Russian political figures like Duma member Konstantin Zatulin, who is also Director of the Institute for CIS Countries, believe that Putin's remarks signal Moscow's willingness "to respect the choice of the Ossetian people."⁹

Russia is also insisting that Georgia formally and publicly renounce violence as a means of regaining the breakaway provinces, without even considering that it too should renounce force for those purposes. At least since 2007, Moscow's true objective has been Georgian "neutrality", i.e. Georgia's renunciation of its pro-Western orientation, and thus further curtailment of its sovereignty.¹⁰ Indeed, this demand that Georgia surrender some of its freedom in national security policy may well be Moscow's core objective here. It is therefore disheartening that Russian analysts unanimously perceive the US' reset policy as an act of recogni-

6 "Interview with Mamuka Areshidze, "Tbilisi, Sakartvelos Respublika, in Georgian, August 10, 2011, FBIS SOV, August 17, 2011

7 Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Russia, NTV, "August 31, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82916_206003.shtml (henceforth Medvedev, Interview)

8 "Interview With Russian Political Analyst, Boris Sokolov," Tbilisi, Sakartvelos Respublika, in Georgian, August 6, 2011, FBIS SOV, August 9, 2011

9 Moscow, Interfax-AVN Online, in English, August 3, 2011, FBIS SOV, August 3, 2011

10 Moscow, Vesti TV, in Russian, February 6, 2007

tion by the US and the West of Moscow's predominance in its chosen sphere of influence, and believe that these parties are therefore unwilling to challenge Russia's constant efforts to restrict the independence and sovereignty of other members of the CIS - not just Georgia.¹¹ Moscow's Georgian policy seems to be under the control of the political elite (Silovye Struktury) who are motivated both by their desire for power and wealth in southern Russia, and the belief that the US is itching to invade Russia over the Georgian issue or to intervene there. As a result, Moscow has strengthened its position in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by creating numerous military bases, installing FSB (Federal Security Service / Federativnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnost) puppets into power there, and preparing for the possible incorporation of these provinces into Russia.¹² These actions violate both the 1975 Helsinki accords and also the truce or armistice agreed with the EU in 2008 during the conflict. Yet Russia has paid no price for these violations, and actually denies committing such breaches.¹³

11 Sergei Stokan and Dmitry Sidorov, "In the World: and Now the Rest," *Moscow, Kommersant Online, in Russian, July 27, 2009, FBIS SOV, July 27, 2009; Event Transcript: The Carnegie Russia-Europe Forum - "The Next Decade: What Kind of Partner Can Russia Be," Carnegie Europe: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 26, 2010, p. 28; Bryan Whitmore, "Power Vertical: Moscow, Washington, and the Near Abroad," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, May 20, 2010, www.rferl.org;*

12 Trenin, pp. 29-34, 93-99 plus press

13 Interview by Dmitry Medvedev." <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/2680>. August 5, 2011 (Henceforth Medvedev Interview-2)

Seeing that it can act with impunity, Russia is aggressively extending its influence in the South Caucasus. Prime Minister Putin recently suggested that Moscow could incorporate these provinces 'Soviet style', i.e. through arranged and manipulated plebiscites.¹⁴ While President Medvedev criticized this approach, on the grounds that the legal requirements for incorporation are not in place; this might have been more than just a criticism of Putin. It also could mean that Moscow is planning to implement those "requirements."¹⁵ Potentially, over 150,000 people in these two provinces could participate in the December 2011 Russian Duma elections; Russia's Central Elections Commission is establishing polling stations around Russian military bases in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁶ While Putin's and Medvedev's recent statements about Georgia might be attributed to electioneering in Russia, these statements also stimulate popular demand (particularly among the Silovye Struktury) for further action against Georgia.¹⁷ Statements calling Georgia's President Saakashvili 'pathological' and insisting that the war's outcomes are

14 "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Speaks With Participants of the Seliger-2011 Youth Educational Forum," <http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/16080/>, August 1, 2011

15 Medvedev Interview-2

16 Nikolaus Von Twickel, "Georgian Provinces to Vote for the Duma," *Moscow Times*, August 3, 2011, www.themoscowtimes.com

17 Stephen Blank, "Medvedev's Remarks on Georgian War Anniversary: Politics, Lies, and Electioneering," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 10, 2011; Medvedev Interview-2; "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Speaks With Participants of the Seliger-2011 Youth Educational Forum."

irreversible only guarantee the continuing deadlock in the Geneva negotiations, and sustain Russia's cold war against Georgia.

Threats to European and Eurasian Security

The features of Georgia's security climate lead us to define this situation as a cold war environment, and emphasize the precariousness of its internal and external security. But the consequences of the 2008 war go beyond Georgia. In many respects they go to the heart of European security and reaffirm that European, Eurasian, and Transcaucasian security is ultimately indivisible. Russian sources now concede that the decision to cut off Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia was to provide a legal structure (albeit a disingenuous one) that would allow Moscow to permanently station troops there, allegedly to deter the US from intervening, or to threaten Georgia.¹⁸

While contemporary reports suggested that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs opposed the idea because it created a precedent that could and has since been invoked against Moscow in the North Caucasus; the decision to invade Georgia demonstrates at the least the supremacy of military-inspired and even paranoid threat perceptions in Moscow, if not the possibility that the armed forces have the potential to override the civilian authorities in Moscow, creat-

ing a dangerous precedent.¹⁹

Indeed, since 2009, Russian law has enshrined the right of its armed forces to intervene on behalf of Russian citizens in foreign lands where their honor and dignity is at risk, a justification for extra-territorial intervention from the Baltic to Central Asia. This legislation also confirms the well-known fact that many Russian political figures openly question the sovereignty of post-Soviet states.²⁰ This should not come as a surprise. Immediately after the Russo-Georgian war, Medvedev announced that henceforth he would build his foreign policy around five principles, one of which supports Russian intervention in states where the "interests and dignity" of the Russian minority are deemed to be at risk. Medvedev also asserted that Russia has privileged interests in countries that he refused to specify, demonstrating that Russia is seeking more than just influence in Eurasia; it also wants to revise borders or intervene in other states.²¹

On December 16th, 2009 the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's Parliament, quietly gave President Medvedev sole and complete

19 This is not just a question of the military making a coup which is highly unlikely, rather it is the regime's willingness to accept as fact the fabricated and panicked threat assessments of the armed forces and intelligence services to justify continuing militarization and a quasi-cold war posture abroad.

*20 Stephen Blank, "The Values Gap Between Moscow and the West: the Sovereignty Issue," *Acque et Terre*, No. 6, 2007, pp. 9-14 (Italian), 90-95 (English)*

21 "Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Russia, NTV, "August 31, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82916_206003.shtml

18 Trenin, pp. 29-34, 93-99

authority to decide if, how, and when Russia's forces could be deployed beyond its national borders.²² This law foreshadows many potentially dangerous consequences for all of Eurasia – in addition to those listed above. In many respects, the wording of this law contravenes international law and the UN's language pertaining to relevant situations. Beyond that,

Due to its vague and ambiguous wording, the new Russian legislation has radically expanded the range of circumstances under which Moscow considers it legitimate to deploy troops abroad, as well as the list of states in which Russia may station armed forces in accordance with the law.²³

Second,

The clause concerning the protection of Russian citizens in foreign states grants Moscow the right of unilateral military intrusion into any country in which Russian citizens reside on a permanent or temporary basis under a wide set of arbitrarily construed circumstances. It does not specify precisely what 'an armed attack' constitutes, how many Russian citizens

need to be under attack to justify Russian intervention, whether such an attack would be carried out by armed forces or law-enforcement agencies of a foreign state or by non-state armed groups, and whether the Russian government has to obtain an official sanction to act in a foreign territory from the UN Security Council or from the authorities of the particular state where Russian citizens are under attack.²⁴

Third, this law radically alters the security situation in the CIS and the Baltic by giving Russia a legal platform for the justification of unilateral intervention into any territory belonging to these states that is not provided for in the founding documents of existing treaty organizations in the CIS, and thus undermines the validity of both the state sovereignty and the treaties, and with it, the protection of the sovereignty and integrity of those states. As Yuri Fedorov writes,

Russia's self-proclaimed right to defend its troops against armed attacks affects Moscow's relations with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, all of which are parties to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and, with the exception of Belarus, the Shanghai Coop-

²² Moscow, *ITAR-TASS*, in English, December 16, 2009, , *FBIS SOV*, December 16, 2009

²³ Yuri E. Fedorov, *Medvedev's Amendments to the Law on Defence: The Consequences For Europe* Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Briefing Paper No. 47, November 2009, p. 5

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6

eration Organization (SCO), and which also have bilateral arrangements on military assistance with Russia. Russian troops and military facilities are deployed in all of these states, with the exception of Uzbekistan. Neither the Collective Security Treaty, nor any bilateral arrangements imply Russia's right to make unilateral decisions about the form, scope and very fact of employing its forces in the aforementioned states. All of these issues were to be decided either by all parties to the CSTO collectively, or by parties to the corresponding bilateral treaty. Decisions on counter-terrorist activities in the framework of the SCO are made by consensus. The new Russian legislation did not cancel out the multilateral or bilateral decision-making procedures yet it devalued those procedures in a sense. If Russian troops deployed in some of these countries are involved in international or internal conflicts, which is quite possible, Moscow will have a pretext for using them and duly deploying additional units in a unilateral manner. The right to defend Russian troops on foreign soil is of particular importance for Russia's relations with Ukraine and Moldova. The

Ukrainian government has demanded the withdrawal of the Russian naval base after 2017, while Moldova insists on the immediate departure of Russian troops from Transnistria. In turn, Moscow has set its sights on stationing its troops there indefinitely. In such a context, skirmishes of any degree of gravity involving Russian servicemen in these countries may furnish Moscow with a pretext for military intervention.²⁵

Fourth, as Fedorov notes, this law directly contradicts the language of the draft treaty on European security submitted by Medvedev to European governments on November 29th, 2009.²⁶ While that draft treaty pledges multilateralism, the new law shows that, "Moscow favors a unilateral approach towards security issues and wants a free hand if and when conflict situations arise."²⁷ Fifth, this law has released Medvedev from any obligation to consult with legislative bodies. As there are no existing checks or balances that could prohibit such military deployments, Medvedev is free to do as he pleases with those forces. Thus a Russian President may send troops abroad on the vaguest of pretexts, without any accountability whatsoever. Medve-

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "European Security Treaty," November 29, 2009, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2009/11/223072.shtml>

²⁷ Fedorov, p. 6

dev's own term, legal nihilism, only begins to address the implications of this situation.²⁸

Finally, as Fedorov notes, this law may also shed some light on Moscow's future external ambitions; it does suggest that the war with Georgia and the subsequent political-military developments in that neighborhood may come to signal a precedent rather than a one-off incident. Specifically:

In particular, the Russian intelligence services may plan to ignite disturbances and ethnic clashes in Sevastopol, resulting in attacks against the Black Sea Fleet servicemen or facilities by criminal groups or an unruly mob. This would give Russia the legal grounds to intervene militarily in the Crimean peninsula, occupy Sevastopol or the whole peninsula and retain its naval base for an indefinite period of time. Another scenario presupposes the engineering of ethnic clashes in Estonia and/or Latvia, which may be exploited by Moscow as a pretext for military intervention, or at least for the threat of such intervention. Widespread rioting and looting in Tallinn in April 2007, provoked by the

decision to relocate the Soviet Army monument, yet fuelled and orchestrated by Russian agents, confirmed that Moscow has enough instruments at its disposal to destabilize the situation in large cities in Latvia and Estonia with a substantial proportion of ethnic Russians.²⁹

This law, and the overall defense policy of which it is part, has built upon precedents set by earlier Russian policies and other potential pretexts for action ranging from the Baltic to Central Asia. In 2003, speaking on Russia's recently released white paper on military policy, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov observed that Moscow could use preventive force in cases where a threat is growing and is "visible, clear, and unavoidable." While to some degree that has been standard practice (e.g. Israel in 1967), the message was unsettling, particularly as Ivanov added that military force could be used in cases where "there is an attempt to limit Russia's access to regions that are essential to its survival, or those that form an important [area], from an economic or financial point of view."³⁰ So while the threats to Georgia's security from Russia are obviously much more acute than threats posed by Russia to other former Soviet republics, they differ

²⁹ Fedorov, p. 7

²⁸ "Medvedev's Push for Control of Russian Military Unsettles Caucasus" *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5004308,00.html?maca=en-rss-en-all-1573-rdf>. December 11, 2009

³⁰ Sophie Lambroschini, "Russia: Moscow Struggles To Clarify Stance On Pre-emptive Force," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, October 14, 2003, www.rferl.org/ncafeatures/2003/10/14102203171155.asp

only in magnitude or intensity; Moscow does not consider any of these countries to be truly sovereign states whose integrity, independence, and sovereignty deserve Russian respect. In this sense, Russia's legislation and attitude implicitly threaten the sovereignty of all of these states.

Helsinki final Act and EU

Clearly the threats to Georgia are not entirely personal; rather they target the entire post-Cold War European settlement. Moscow does not deny that it is seeking to revise that settlement in order to undermine NATO and block European integration - as demonstrated by its draft European Security Treaty of 2009.³¹ On this basis, whether or not Georgia fired the first shot in 2008 is ultimately irrelevant, though it was clearly a victim of provocation. Moscow's overt aim all along has been to deny Georgia and other CIS states the right to freely exercise their independence. This is what is at stake in the entire CIS sphere.

Likewise, Turkey was seriously affected by this war. Having let a US humanitarian ship through the Black Sea Straits, Turkey found itself economically targeted by Moscow, and realized that it was too dependent on Russia - its largest trading partner - for energy and trade, i.e. its dependence on Russian trade was asymmetrical to an excessive degree.

³¹ "The Draft of the European Security Treaty," <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/275>, November 29, 2009

Turkish policy immediately pivoted, shifting its emphasis away from Russian dependency. While avoiding angering Russia, Turkey promoted a stability pact for the Caucasus, which included both Russia and itself, as a means of stabilizing and thus limiting Russian influence. Furthermore, Turkey galvanized its campaign to normalize relations with Armenia, to gain better access to it, and Azerbaijan; the government signed an agreement with Tehran to develop and ship gas from Iran; and intensified its quest to diversify its energy supply and facilitate an Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan rapprochement to increase possibilities for alternative gas supplies from Central Asia and for the EU's Nabucco pipeline to reduce dependence on Russia.³² Although not all of these initiatives have borne fruit, their timing surely reflects Ankara's recognition of significant regional and international changes that were jeopardizing a number of its key economic interests.

³² Alexander Murinson, "Russia Accuses Turkey of Violating Montreux Convention," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, October 15, 2008; Gila Benmayor, "As Our Energy Dependence on Russia Increases," *Istanbul, Hurriyet Daily News.com*, in English, January 3, 2009, FBIS SOV, January 3, 2009; Dogu Ergil, "Opening Doors and hearts," *Istanbul, Today's Zaman*, in English, September 10, 2008, FBIS SOV, September 10, 2008; Robert M. Cutler, "Turkey Has a Rough road ahead," *Asia Times Online*, www.atimes.com, August 27, 2008; Alman Mir Ismail, "Responding to Georgia Crisis, Turkey Seeks New Security Initiative in the Caucasus," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 22, 2008; "Russia: Turkey: a Reduction in Tensions," www.strafor.com, September 19, 2008; "Iran, Turkey Sign Gas Accord," *Agence France Presse*, November 17, 2008; Thomas Grove and Orhan Coskun, "Turkey Moves to Diversify Gas Supply After Russia Row," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2008, www.theguardian.co.uk; Igor Torbakov, *the Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations*, Jamestown Foundation,

Yet Europe and the Obama Administration have refused to see these consequences for what they are. First of all, this war and its aftermath constitute a major blow to the naïve idealism of the EU's overall political-economic strategy, as it "underlined the enduring utility of force in inter-state relations."³³

Similarly Colin Gray wrote then that,

What is so dangerous about U.S.-Russian relations is that they have an explicitly continental military focus along, indeed across, a strategic frontier between NATO and Russia that is very much in live contention. Russia's spat with Georgia in September (actually August-author) 2008 needs to be regarded as a reliable sign of severe dangers to come.³⁴

Taken in their totality, the consequences of this war hold immense geopolitical (and geo-economic) significance. A German study of the war's consequences concludes:

The escalation of the local conflict in South Ossetia into a European crisis has shown that the existing structures – NATO, EU, OSCE and CIS

– are plainly unable to prevent conflict between hostile countries. Russia's elites, wanting to see their country regain its former role as a great power, ignore the normative framework the OSCE tries to establish, and disregard the CIS. Plainly neither organization is strong enough to structure a region extending from Europe through to Central Asia. NATO and the EU, on the other hand, are perceived as a threat by the Russian leadership, which makes them in their present form unsuited for integrating an expanded Europe. So the crisis has thrown up the medium-term task of redesigning the European order -- to include Russia.³⁵

Sokolov also underscored the dangers to the European status quo, caused by permitting Russia to use force with impunity.

In August 2008, Russia demonstrated to everyone that it is able to use armed force in the post-Soviet area. It emerged that the reaction of both Europe and the United States to the type of action by Russia was mild. Precisely after the August 2008 war, the Krem-

33 Dov Lynch, "ESDP and the OSCE," Giovanni Grevi, Damien Helly, Daniel Keohane, eds., *ESDP: the First Ten years (1999-2009)*, Paris: Institute for Security Studies of the European Union, 2009, p. 143, www.iss-eu.org

34 Colin Gray, *National Security Dilemmas: Challenges & Opportunities*, Foreword by General Paul Van Riper (USMC) Ret. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc. Washington, D.C., 2009, p. 6

35 "Problems and Recommendations," Hans-Henning Schroeder Ed., *The Caucasus Crisis: International Perceptions and Policy Implications for Germany and Europe*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute of International and Security Affairs, 2008, www.swp-berlin.org, 2008, p. 5

lin increased its pressure on Ukraine. That pressure made the change of government in Ukraine possible. Incidentally, after the change of government in Ukraine, Russia noticeably increased its pressure on the Baltic countries too. And all this indicates that, after the August war, Russia's influence in the post-Soviet area has become increasingly noticeable. True, this might not be what the Kremlin is dreaming about regarding the post-Soviet area, but this is certainly what happened.³⁶

Thus Europe's lukewarm response to the situation directly undermines Georgia's security, even if it does so unintentionally. Even if one argues that the EU has increased its visibility in local conflict resolution processes, the results are minimal, due to Russian obstruction, Georgia's own unsettled domestic political conditions after the war, and the EU's long-term reluctance to commit serious resources to the post-Soviet area, a reluctance that predates the 2008 war by many years.³⁷ Nor do the threats unleashed by this war end here. As Sergey Markedonov observes, the repercussions of the war in Georgia for Moscow have come the form of intensified war in the North Caucasus.

³⁶ FBIS SOV, August 9, 2011

³⁷ Mehmet Bardakci, "EU ENGAGEMENT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN GEORGIA: TOWARDS A MORE PROACTIVE ROLE," CAUCASIAN REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, IV, NO.3, SUMMER, 2010, pp. 214-236

Now those two areas are linked in the sense that security and peace north of the Caucasus Mountains crucially depends on the peace and stability south of the range.³⁸ Similarly, as Markedonov observed that Russia, now party to internationally managed negotiations in Geneva, wants to obtain a ratification of the new status quo that it created by force; he warns that

At the same time, it is still hard to grasp that the two conflicts in question are not simply a matter of rivalry of ambitions and interests, but also an objective process. It is a question of the formation of nation-states after the destruction of imperial formations and the victory of the nationalist discourse. The breakup of the Soviet Union was not the end point in this process - it was a beginning. Such processes, by definition, are not completed quickly. A conflict of "imagined geographies," different mentalities, is in progress. And not only the conflict but the actual formation of political and even ethnic identities is not yet finished.³⁹

Certainly we see the potential for this

³⁸ Sergey Markedonov, "The Big Caucasus: Consequences of the "Five Day War": Threats and Political Prospects," Xenophon Papers, No. 7, 2009, pp. 51-52, www.icbss.org

³⁹ Sergei Markedonov, "Geneva Talks: From Ideological Confrontation to Diplomatic Routine," Moscow, politikom.ru, in Russian, December 19, 2008, FBIS SOV, December 27, 2008

in the insurgency in Russia's North Caucasus, if not elsewhere. Other observers like Lawrence Sheets, the Caucasus Program Director for the International Crisis Group, warn that the so-called frozen conflicts along the former Soviet peripheries are now thawing, and could generate further ethno-political conflicts there or elsewhere.⁴⁰

Moreover, Russia has failed to translate its military conquests into a legitimate new order. Thus its alleged victory in a limited war remains incomplete. In turn, that state of incompleteness serves as a constant temptation for one or both sides to undertake policies that could reignite the process. Indeed, one of the specific defects of Russia's highly problematic civilian control over its multiple militaries is that the regime, both at home and abroad, is constantly subjected to the temptation of using military measures to settle political problems, through the mentality and rhetoric of constant threats and war that it has created. Russia could have simply ejected the Georgian army from South Ossetia in 2008, demonstratively reinstalled the status quo ante, and won a resounding victory, establishing its red lines - but achieved with international legitimacy. Instead it chose to create a permanent irredentist situation in the region, a situation resembling Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prus-

sian war in 1870. Consequently it violated a cardinal precept of its own strategy of limited war. If a state uses a limited war to revise international order and makes demands it cannot enforce, it not only destabilizes the international order that protected it in the first place, but it also creates a situation whereby there may not exist a viable organizational principle for the new system to operate from or to legitimize the security demands of the belligerent nation. Russia has singularly failed to transform its military achievement into legitimate authority and social order. Consequently the entire North and South Caucasus is in a much more dangerous position - destabilized beyond anyone's ability to bring about legitimate and stable order - than it was in 2008.

Nor does anyone seem to be interested in trying to reconstruct even the basis for such order. Although rhetorically, the US is strongly backing Georgia, it will not sell it the weapons it wants for self-defense, lest they anger Russia and jeopardize the reset policy. This makes the US complicit in extending Russia's embargo on arms sales to Georgia.⁴¹ Though Secretary of State Clinton rightly denounced Russia's occupation of Georgia and Abkhazia, we have already seen that in practice no pressure is being brought upon Russia for reneging

40 Brian Whitmore, "2008 In Review: War, Peace, and Football Diplomacy in the South Caucasus," *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, December 26, 2008

41 Joshua Kucera, "Gates on NDN, Gabala, Arms Sales to Georgia," *Eurasia insight*, September 15, 2010, www.eurasianet.org/node/61935; http://wikileaks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/12/07/wikileaks_us_ambassador_to_russia_went_arm_georgia/dueto/the_reset

on its international responsibilities under the Helsinki Final Act, or the 2008 armistice accord. Privately, officials say that such statements are only for the public record, and that in reality, the US Administration will not go beyond providing economic assistance and training the Georgians for Afghanistan-like operations, as opposed to what is needed to defend their country. Indeed, high-ranking officials in the US have made it clear that they do not want to be bothered with these issues lest they derail or sidetrack the reset policy.⁴² So while we may see US sympathy for Georgia, Tbilisi is mistaken in assuming that Georgia represents a key interest of the Obama administration.⁴³

We can also see the EU's inability to function strategically or grasp what is at stake here in its trade negotiations with Georgia. The EU and Georgia are currently negotiating a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). Since NATO membership is closed to Georgia, and Georgia identifies strongly with European values in general (though less with what EU liberals consider to be European values), the DCFTA is an eminently logical step for both parties in terms of boosting economic strength, and in enhancing the EU's presence in the South Caucasus and Georgia's internal - if not external - security. While the Centre for Euro-

pean Policy Studies⁴⁴ criticized the EU's proposal, EU officials have strongly defended it and criticized the Centre's findings. However, objective observers like Thomas De Waal have argued that the EU has failed to tell Georgia exactly what it wants of Georgia, or to clarify its readiness to take the current negotiations to a successful conclusion.⁴⁵ The EU's visible ambivalence shows that in many respects it, like NATO, is unwilling to assume the lead in truly projecting a Europe that is whole and free. Meanwhile the current crisis of the Euro and of the EU project shows that no serious vision for the future can be envisioned or expected anytime soon, let alone one built along the lines of further expansion or EU integration of Georgia or other post-Soviet states. In light of this, claims by the Georgian government that the country will join NATO long before it joins the EU are hollow and insubstantial, based on wishful thinking rather than sober analysis.⁴⁶

Georgia's Path Forward

Georgia's only strong card, besides the fact that Russia has nothing to gain from reopening the conflict, is

⁴⁴ www.ceps.be

⁴⁵ Patrick Messerlin, Michael Emerson, Gia Janidieri, Alexandre Le Vernoy, *An Appraisal of the EU's Trade Policy Towards Its Eastern Neighbors: The Case of Georgia*, Paris and Brussels: Group D 'Economie Mondiale, Sciences Po and Centre for European Policy Studies, 2011, www.ceps.be; Thomas De Waal, *Georgia's Choices: Crafting a Future in Uncertain Times*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011, pp. 35-38, www.ceip.org

⁴⁶ "Interview with Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze," Vienna, Kurier, in German, August 22, 2011, *FBIS SOV*, August 22, 2011

⁴² *Conversations With US Analysts and Officials, 2010-11*

⁴³ James Wertsch, "U.S. Interest or Sympathy in Georgia,?" Tbilisi, *The Georgian Times Online*, in English, August 19, 2011, *FBIS SOV*, August 19, 2011

its capability as a World Trade Organization member to veto Russia's entry into the WTO. Russia has sought entry on and off for the past 17 years, and can only gain entry if members approve unanimously. Georgia uses this card to obstruct Moscow's efforts to integrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into its economy by preventing the unchecked flow of goods in and out of the two provinces. Thus Georgia's formal position is that its main problem with Russia's WTO accession is the illegal trade and customs administration in those provinces, a claim that goes back to Georgia's contention that these are not sovereign states and that therefore Georgia has economic and trade rights.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Medvedev says Russia will not change its policy or make deals with Georgia to gain entry into the WTO, so here too there may well be another deadlock that derives from the larger ongoing one in Geneva.⁴⁸ Given the immense benefits that WTO membership would give to Russia, a Georgian veto, which is entirely possible, would underscore that Moscow has probably lost more than it has gained by annexing these provinces. But given the neo-imperial mentality that dominates Russian policymaking towards Georgia, that potential loss will probably not push Russian leaders to rethink their position. Thus stalemate and continuing

47 Moscow, *Interfax*, in English, August 9, 2011, FBIS SOV, August 9, 2011

48 "Interview by Dmitry Medvedev," <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/12204>, August 5, 2011

Cold War like pressures are likely to endure for some time, and with them, the likelihood of another violent crisis in the Caucasus.

Under the circumstances, Georgia, like other small states, must vigorously defend its own security.⁴⁹ This means not waiting passively for Washington or Brussels. Rather it means consistently strengthening Georgian democracy, economic competitiveness, and conformity to the EU's standards, and refraining from provocative actions regarding the North Caucasus, such as recognizing the Circassian massacres of 1863 as a genocide (which merely provokes Russian anger to no real gain).⁵⁰ But most of all it means making a realistic proposal for Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence. It should be clear to any unbiased observer that no Georgian state since 1990 has answered Abkhazian and South Ossetian demands for self-rule with any credible action or plan. This ongoing failure merely provides Moscow with a pretext for remaining in these territories. By promising independence or at least a UN sponsored plebiscite on withdrawal of all foreign troops and their replacement by UN forces with a robust mandate, Georgia not only un-

49 As the former Supreme Commander of Swedish Armed Forces, General Ole Wiktorin, observed, in reference to Bosnia's wars, "As a result of Bosnia and other armed conflicts we have come to accept war on European territory. The message is, in particular for a small nation, that if you do not take care of your security no one else may care." "The Jane's Interview," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 15, 1994, p. 56.

50 Thomas DE Waal, *Georgia's Choices: Charting a Future in Uncertain Times*, Washington, D.C. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011

burdens itself of a political albatross, it eliminates the security problems that block its entry into NATO and the EU, and forces Russia to defend itself against charges of imperialism. Though Georgian politicians claim no Georgian leader can accept the departure of these states from Georgian sovereignty, they must recognize what Willy Brandt told Germany in 1972, namely that those territories were gambled away a long time ago.⁵¹

This may be an unpopular recommendation in Tbilisi, but the alternative of doing nothing, waiting for Washington and Brussels who will not do more than they are already doing, and occasionally provoking Russia for purely psychological gratification is the political equivalent of “waiting for Godot”.⁵²

Indeed, Georgia has no bayonets upon which to sit, even if that were possible. While Georgia faces serious risks, it possesses the resources to strengthen its position and cut the losses that it must incur for its previous political missteps. But if it fails to independently take the necessary domestic and foreign policy actions, it will remain at the mercy of allies whose resources and attention span are not only limited, but also who historically have always preferred Russia over its neighbors.

Under the circumstances, that is not a way forward for Georgia, nor for anyone else.

⁵¹ Based on conversations with Georgian analysts and officials from 2008-2011

⁵² Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, first performed in Paris, 1953