



Russian Aggression of Georgia

ESCALATION OF CRISES 2004-AUGUST 2008

Russian Policy Toward Georgia in the Months Before the Invasion

- **Georgian peace proposals repeatedly rejected by Russia (2004 onwards):** Beginning in 2004, the Georgian Government has repeatedly proposed to launch genuine peace processes for both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Years of stalemate had left populations of all ethnic backgrounds in both conflict zones impoverished and without any effective protection of basic rights. Georgians in particular were targeted and persecuted on ethnic grounds. The Russian Federation and separatist leaders have repeatedly rejected Georgia's peace initiatives, even when these were backed by the international community.
- **Russia gains stranglehold over separatist governments (2005 onwards):** In recent years, Moscow has been exerting an increasing stranglehold over the separatist governments. The policy of demanding Russian citizenship of residents of the two territories to allow them to receive pensions, jobs and travel rights was actively encouraged by the widespread distribution of Russian passports. While the economic situation varies somewhat between the two territories, in both personal options were severely limited. As a result, Abkhazia and South Ossetia became hubs for serious criminal activities, including the smuggling of weapons-grade uranium and the printing of large quantities of counterfeit US dollars.

Despite this stranglehold, Russia's trust in its separatist vassals was not complete. For that reason, since 2005, Russian military and civilian officials without any family or personal ties to the region have been **seconded from Moscow to govern South Ossetia**. At the time of Russia's invasion, this included the Ossete prime minister, defense minister and more.

- **Russia builds illegal base near Tskhinvali (2006):** In spring 2006, Russian forces build a base in the strategically located town of Java (north of Tskhinvali). The base offers housing for 2,500 soldiers and includes substantial fuel storage capabilities.
- **CIS arms/economic embargo lifted illegally by Moscow (March 2008):** In March, the Russian Federation unilaterally (and illegally) withdrew from a CIS economic and arms embargo imposed in 1994 on the secessionist region of Abkhazia.
- **International community condemns Russia's legal recognition of S. Ossetia & Abkhazia (April 2008):** On April 16, Moscow sharply escalates tensions by decreeing the establishment of legal links between Russia and the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This act integrated the two territories into Russia's legal space and is a form of de facto annexation of Georgian territory. It drew sharp rebukes from the international Community, including the EU, the US, the OSCE, and others, who call for the immediate reversal of this Russian decision.
- **United Nations confirms Russia downs Georgian aircraft over Georgian airspace (April 2006):** On April 20, a Russian fighter jet attacks and destroys an unarmed Georgian drone operated by the Ministry of Interior over Georgia's airspace, near the town of Ganmukhuri. This act of aggression was subsequently confirmed by formal UNOMIG and OSCE investigations.

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- **Russia increases troop strength & introduces paratroopers into Abkhazia (May/June 2008):** In the following weeks, Russia continues to boost its troop numbers in Abkhazia, without fulfilling its legal obligation to seek the consent of Georgia. Among other moves, it deploys paratrooper units, which are incompatible with the existing format for peacekeeping.
- **Russia moves illegal heavy weaponry & offensive forces into Abkhazia (May/June 2008):** In direct contravention of all peacekeeping norms and agreements, Russia introduces additional offensive military troops and heavy weaponry in Abkhazia. This step was verified by UNOMIG.
- **Russian railroad troops sent to Abkhazia to prepare rails for invasion (May 26, 2008):** On May 26, Russia sends over 400 of Ministry of Defense “railroad troops” into Abkhazia to reinforce the rail infrastructure needed for military action; these troops do not belong to any peacekeeping unit.
- **As peace plan advances, Russian provocations move to S. Ossetia (July 2008):** In July, as the efforts by Georgia and the international community to advance peace proposals for Abkhazia are gathering pace, the focus of Russian provocations suddenly shifts to South.
- **Separatists attempt to assassinate S. Ossetian unionist leader (July 3, 2008):** On July 3, South Ossetian separatists attempt to assassinate Dimitry Sanakoyev, the Head of the Temporary Administration of South Ossetia ; 5 policemen are injured.
- **Russia defiantly acknowledges violating Georgian airspace (July 10, 2008):** On July 9, four Russian military aircraft violate Georgian airspace on the eve of US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice’s visit to Tbilisi. Although Russia has a long history of such violations, this is the first time Moscow acknowledges it has done so deliberately.
- **Russia undertakes large-scale military exercises near S. Ossetia: & Abkhazia (July 2008):** On 15 July, Russia launches a large-scale military exercise on Georgia’s northern border named “Caucasus 2008.” The Russian Defense Ministry claims that the exercise, involving over 8,000 troops and 700 armored and other vehicles, is aimed at preparing for “special peace enforcement operations” in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the exercise, anti-Georgian leaflets entitled “Know Your Enemy” are distributed. Russian troops do not leave the region when the exercises finish on 2 August.
- **Separatists reject German-mediated peace plan (July 18, 2008):** On July 18, Abkhaz separatists reject a German mediated peace plan and refuse to attend peace talks scheduled in Berlin.
- **EU organizes peace talks, separatists fail to appear (July 22-24, 2008):** On July 22–24, the EU tries to hold talks in Brussels between representatives of the Government of Georgia and the South Ossetian separatists, with the participation of the Russian Federation. The separatists refuse to participate, initially objecting to the title of Minister Yakobashvili—“Minister for Reintegration.” In response, the Georgian Government appoints Mr. Yakobashvili as a Special Envoy for Conflict Resolution. The separatists once again refuse to attend the talks on unspecified grounds.
- **OSCE proposes peace talks, separatists reject proposal (late July 2008):** The OSCE Chairman in Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, proposes talks in Helsinki in early August between South Ossetian separatists and the Georgian Government. The separatists reject the proposal.