

## Russian invasion rumor panics Georgians before evaporating

Contributed by Debkafile  
Monday, 11 August 2008  
Last Updated Monday, 11 August 2008

Moscow calls Georgian president "war criminal," rejects ceasefire, Russian armor pours into South Ossetia and Abkhazia,

Russian invasion rumor panics Georgians before evaporating  
DEBKAFfile Exclusive Analysis

August 11, 2008, 10:07 PM (GMT+02:00)

DEBKAFfile's military sources report that Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili, under heavy Russian siege, claimed Monday night, Aug. 11, that the Russians had invaded the country and "cut it in half". A full-scale retreat of Georgian troops was ordered from the border town of Gori to defend the capital Tbilisi 60 km away. In the event, Moscow denied seizing the town — or any plans for advancing on the Georgian capital — and turned the panic around to ridicule the pro-Western president.

Our sources believe Saakashvili had hoped that word of a Russian invasion of Georgia proper would finally stir the US and Europe into action to save his regime from being trampled by Russian tanks. Moscow had made it obvious that it would only hold its fire after his regime was gone and replaced by a Moscow-friendly administration.

The Russians sustained their three-day aerial bombardment of Gori, even after the town emptied of inhabitants and troops. This kept the rumor of an imminent Russian invasion alive in the world media for as long as necessary.

DEBKAFfile's Moscow sources report that Russian strategists believed that, by pulling the invasion scare carpet from under the president's feet a few hours later, they could turn his campaign of panic and despair into a boomerang which would topple him without outside aid.

If not, the Russian president, prime minister and military chiefs would put their heads together again as they did on Monday and decide on their next move.

In the meantime, Russian troops entered Georgia Monday unopposed from another direction and captured the town of Senaki, 40 km from the northwestern breakaway province of Abkhazia.

This netted Moscow three advantages:

1. The Georgian outpost in the Kodori Gorge in northern Abkhazia, estimated at 3,000 strong, was cut off from its supply lines.
2. The Russians were in a position to force the outpost's surrender, inflicting a lethal blow to Georgian military morale. Later Monday, having achieved this objective, the Russian defense ministry announced the withdrawal of its troops from Senaki after "eliminating the threat to south Abkhazia."
3. The loss of the strategic Kodori Gorge should prove painful enough to deter the Georgian government from persisting in laying claim to Abkhazian territory for many years to come.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5500>

-----  
Moscow calls Georgian president "war criminal," rejects ceasefire  
DEBKAFfile Special Report and Analysis  
August 11, 2008, 5:38 PM (GMT+02:00)

Both sides in the Russian-Georgian war traded accusations of continuing the fighting and genocide Monday, Aug. 11, the fourth day of the conflict, as the Kremlin rejected the Georgian president's Mikhail Saakashvili's ceasefire document before it was delivered by the French and Finnish foreign ministers from Tbilisi.

The Russian ambassador to NATO said it cannot deal with the "war criminal"; Georgian president.

Saakashvili accused Moscow of seeking "regime change" in Georgia.

Russia confirmed its troops had moved out of breakaway Abkhazia to the northwest and invaded the Georgian town of Senaki. Earlier in the day Gen. Sergei Chaban, commander of Russian "peacekeepers" in the breakaway province of Abkhazia, threatened this would happen if Georgia did not disarm and withdraw its troops from the province.

Chaban said that 9,000 additional troops and 350 armored vehicles had arrived in Abkhazia to support Russian "peacekeepers" there, the same tactic which previously brought massive Russian might to the other breakaway province of South Ossetia, where the conflict first flared.

President George Bush has again condemned Russia's "disproportionate and unacceptable" use of force and called for mediation.

Russian planes bombed Tbilisi international airport and a military airfield near the capital Sunday night Aug. 10, after Georgia, beginning to crack, handed the Russian embassy in Tbilisi a desperate message offering to halt military action in South Ossetia and withdraw its troops from the region. Russian forces were then reported to be on the way to invading the Georgian town of Gori after moving in on the second Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia.

The Russian president Dimitry Medvedev rejected the Georgian appeal and said the war would go on until Tbilisi withdrew its forces unconditionally from South Ossetia and pledged never to attack the region again. This is tantamount to Georgia accepting its truncation and surrender to Russian hegemony.

DEBKAfile reports that the Russian jets pulverized Gori, leaving hundreds dead, to punish Georgian for invading the South Ossetian capital of Tskhvingali last Thursday.

The air raids of the two Georgian airports took place as the US began flying hundreds of Georgian troops home from Iraq, leaving them nowhere to land.

During the day, Russian soldiers and marines entered Abkhazia, Georgia's second breakaway province, by land and from Russian Black Sea naval vessels, which were ordered to block Georgian ports against arms delivery by sea. This opened a third front in Russia's war with Georgia on Day Three of the armed conflict.

At midday, Ukrainian military circles indicated the possibility of closing Russia's main Black Sea base of Sevastopol to naval ships on their way back from blockading Georgian ports.

The US has drafted a resolution condemning Russia in third UN Security Council session later Sunday.

In the face of President George W. Bush's demand for an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and support for international mediation, Moscow poured an additional 10,000 men and armor into South Ossetia Sunday as well - and Russian jets bombed a military airfield outside the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

Under heavy fire, Georgia "temporarily" pulled its soldiers from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, but stayed in the region and denied it was surrendering. President Mikhail Saakashvili asked the United States to act as mediator with Moscow and appealed to the Russians to stop "this madness";

That was Sunday morning.

Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin, for his part, accused Georgia of ethnic cleansing. As disputed casualty figures climbed, civilians were increasingly bearing the brunt of the bloodshed and hardship.

Two Georgian towns, Gori and the Black Sea naval, military and oil port of Poti, also took casualties and heavy damage from Russian air strikes. A third town, Zugdidi on Abkhazian border, was targeted Sunday.

DEBKAfile's military analysts: By flouting US demands to accept mediation, Moscow highlights America's lack of leverage for helping its embattled Georgian ally. The Bush administration has trapped itself in its foreign policy commitment to dialogue and international diplomacy for solving world disputes but is short of willing opposite numbers.

Russia is following Iran's example in exploiting Washington's inhibition to advance its goals by force. Therefore, the Caucasian standoff has profound ramifications for the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Moscow's disdain for Washington's lack of muscle will further encourage Tehran and its terrorist proxies to defy the international community and the United States in particular.

DEBKAfile's military analysts reported Saturday: Tiny Georgia with an army of less than 18,000, having been roundly defeated in South Ossetia, cannot hope to withstand the mighty Russian army in Abkhazia. Therefore, President Saakashvili, who had bid to join NATO, must consider both breakaway regions lost to Georgia and gained by Russia.

This is Moscow's payback for the US-NATO success in detaching Kosovo from Serbia and approving its independence. It is also a warning to Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia against joining up with the United States and the NATO bloc in areas which Moscow deems part of its strategic sphere of influence

After seizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia, four follow-up Russian steps may be postulated:

1. The two separatist provinces will proclaim their independence, just like Kosovo.
2. Russia will continue to exercise its overwhelming military and air might to force the pro-American Saakashvili's capitulation.
3. The Georgian president will not survive in office long after losing two regions of his country and national humiliation. Moscow aims to make Washington swallow a pro-Russian successor.
4. Moscow's trampling of Georgia will serve as an object lesson for Russia's own secessionist provinces such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia not to risk defying Russian armed might.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5498>

-----  
Russia sinks Georgian warship during an attack on Russian Black Sea vessels

DEBKAFile Special Report

August 10, 2008, 9:41 PM (GMT+02:00)

Latest developments Sunday, Aug. 10, 08

- The Russian claim to have sunk a Georgian warship in the Black Sea during an attack on Russian vessels is not confirmed.
- Moscow rejected Georgia's appeal for a ceasefire, demanding its unconditional withdrawal from the breakaway South Ossetia, now controlled by superior Russian forces.
- US planes have begun flying Georgian troops home from Iraq.
- They have nowhere to land after Russian air raids of Tbilisi international airport.
- Israel follows the US and NATO in recognizing Georgia's territorial integrity.
- Abkhazia has decreed a 10-day state of war with Georgia.
- Russia has bombarded two Georgian villages in secessionist Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge.
- UN Security Council convenes Sunday for third bid to formulate a ceasefire resolution.
- The Red Cross reports 40,000 people have been displaced from their homes in Russian-Georgian conflict.
- Georgia "temporarily" pulled troops out of South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali but remains in the breakaway region.
- Saakashvili offers Moscow an immediate ceasefire to stop "this madness."
- An additional 10,000 Russian troops have entered the region.
- Russian Black Sea warships were ordered to block weapons delivery by sea to Georgia and support Abkhazian rebellion.
- Georgia says Russia dropped three bombs on military airfield near the capital, Tbilisi.
- Tbilisi has asked the US to mediate in the crisis.

Latest developments Saturday, Aug. 9, 08

- The UN Security Council fails again to agree on South Ossetia ceasefire.

- More Russian troops head to the embattled region. Russian Black Sea naval ships approach the coast of Abkhazia.
- Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin arrives in North Ossetia.
- The Georgian president says his forces have repelled attacks in Abkhazia
- The foreign minister of Georgia's second breakaway province Sergei Shamba said earlier Abkhazian forces have launched air and artillery strikes to oust Georgian troops.
- Russian jets earlier bombed Georgian positions in Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge.
- Medvedev tells Bush only way out of crisis is for Georgian troops to pull out of the conflict zone.
- Georgia claims shooting down of 10 Russian planes, destroying 30 tanks.
- Tbilisi parliament approves 15-day state of war and martial law.
- President Shaakashvili calls for a ceasefire.
- Bush said Georgia is a sovereign nation whose territorial integrity must be respected. Russia must stop bombing Georgian towns.
- He called on Russia and Georgia to stand their armies down, withdraw to the Aug. 6 status quo and support international mediation.
- Some 100,000 Russian troops are deployed to the troubled region.
- They include special forces from Moscow trained in combat behind enemy lines.
- They have taken the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and are spreading across the region.
- All men aged 18-50 called to reserve duty as Georgia recalls 1,000 troops from Iraq.
- Russian fighters continue to pound the Georgian town of Gori.
- Local hospitals are overflowing with casualties. The region's power, water and telephones are cut off.
- 30,000 refugees have fled the embattled region into Russia.
- Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov warned Georgia's arms suppliers they will be held accountable for the South Ossetia situation.

DEBKAFile's sources say this is directed at the United States and Israel.

- The two-day death toll in South Ossetia combat is estimated at 1,600.
- Russian jets struck Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti, hitting container tanks, a naval base and military logistical center near a major pipeline from Baku.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5496>

-----  
Israel backs Georgia in Caspian Oil Pipeline Battle with Russia  
DEBKAFile Exclusive Report  
August 8, 2008

Georgian tanks and infantry, aided by Israeli military advisers, captured the capital of breakaway South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, early Friday, Aug. 8, bringing the Georgian-Russian conflict over the province to a military climax.

Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin threatened a "military response";

Former Soviet Georgia called up its military reserves after Russian warplanes bombed its new positions in the renegade province.

In Moscow's first response to the fall of Tskhinvali, president Dimitry Medvedev ordered the Russian army to prepare for a national emergency after calling the UN Security Council into emergency session early Friday.

Reinforcements were rushed to the Russian "peacekeeping force" present in the region to support the separatists.

Georgian tanks entered the capital after heavy overnight heavy aerial strikes, in which dozens of people were killed.

Lado Gurgenedze, Georgia's prime minister, said on Friday that Georgia will continue its military operation in South Ossetia until a "durable peace" is reached. "As soon as a durable peace takes hold we need to move forward with dialogue and peaceful negotiations."

DEBKAfile's geopolitical experts note that on the surface level, the Russians are backing the separatists of S. Ossetia and neighboring Abkhazia as payback for the strengthening of American influence in tiny Georgia and its 4.5 million inhabitants. However, more immediately, the conflict has been sparked by the race for control over the pipelines carrying oil and gas out of the Caspian region.

The Russians may just bear with the pro-US Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili's ambition to bring his country into NATO. But they draw a heavy line against his plans and those of Western oil companies, including Israeli firms, to route the oil routes from Azerbaijan and the gas lines from Turkmenistan, which transit Georgia, through Turkey instead of hooking them up to Russian pipelines.

Saakashvili need only back away from this plan for Moscow to ditch the two provinces' revolt against Tbilisi. As long as he sticks to his guns, South Ossetia and Abkhazia will wage separatist wars.

DEBKAfile discloses Israel's interest in the conflict from its exclusive military sources:

Jerusalem owns a strong interest in Caspian oil and gas pipelines reach the Turkish terminal port of Ceyhan, rather than the Russian network. Intense negotiations are afoot between Israel Turkey, Georgia, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan for pipelines to reach Turkey and thence to Israel's oil terminal at Ashkelon and on to its Red Sea port of Eilat. From there, supertankers can carry the gas and oil to the Far East through the Indian Ocean.

Aware of Moscow's sensitivity on the oil question, Israel offered Russia a stake in the project but was rejected.

Last year, the Georgian president commissioned from private Israeli security firms several hundred military advisers, estimated at up to 1,000, to train the Georgian armed forces in commando, air, sea, armored and artillery combat tactics. They also offer instruction on military intelligence and security for the central regime. Tbilisi also purchased weapons, intelligence and electronic warfare systems from Israel.

These advisers were undoubtedly deeply involved in the Georgian army's preparations to conquer the South Ossetian capital Friday.

In recent weeks, Moscow has repeatedly demanded that Jerusalem halt its military assistance to Georgia, finally threatening a crisis in bilateral relations. Israel responded by saying that the only assistance rendered Tbilisi was "defensive";

This has not gone down well in the Kremlin. Therefore, as the military crisis intensifies in South Ossetia, Moscow may be expected to punish Israel for its intervention.

<http://www.debka.com/article.php?aid=1358>

-----  
 Georgia: In 'state of war' with Russia  
 By DAVID NOWAK  
 Associated Press Writer

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) -- Russia expanded its bombing blitz Sunday against neighboring U.S.-allied Georgia, targeting the country's capital for the first time as Russian and Georgian troops continued battling for the contested province of South Ossetia.

Russian jets raided a plant on the eastern outskirts of Tbilisi that builds Su-25 ground jets used by Georgia in the conflict. The attack inflicted some damage to its runways but caused no casualties, said Georgia's Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili.

"We heard a plane go over and then a big explosion," said Malkhaz Chachanidze, a 41-year old ceramics artist whose house is located just outside the fence of the factory, which has been running since the Soviet era. "It woke us up, everything shook."

Russian jets have been roaming Georgia's skies since Friday. They raided several air bases and bombed the Black Sea port city of Poti, which has a sizable oil shipment facility.

The Russian warplanes also struck near the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline which carries Caspian crude to the West, but no supply interruptions have been reported.

U.S. President George W. Bush called for an end to the Russian bombings and an immediate halt to the violence.

"The attacks are occurring in regions of Georgia far from the zone of conflict in South Ossetia. They mark a dangerous escalation in the crisis," Bush said in a statement to reporters while attending the Olympic Games in Beijing.

Georgia President Mikhail Saakashvili called it an "unprovoked brutal Russian invasion."

A Russian raid on Gori near South Ossetia Saturday which apparently targeted a military base on the town's outskirts left numerous civilian casualties.

An Associated Press reporter who visited the town shortly after the strike saw several apartment buildings in ruins, some still on fire, and scores of dead bodies and bloodied civilians. The elderly, women and children were among the victims.

Russian officials said they weren't targeting civilians, but Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Georgia brought the airstrikes upon itself by bombing civilians and Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia. He warned that the small Caucasus country should expect more attacks.

"Whatever side is used to bomb civilians and the positions of peacekeepers, this side is not safe and they should know this," Lavrov said.

Saakashvili on Saturday proposed a cease-fire, but Russia said it wants Georgia to first pull its troops from South Ossetia and sign a pledge not to use force against the breakaway province.

The diplomatic standoff continued Saturday in the U.N. Security Council, which met for the third time since late Thursday night to try to help resolve the situation. Another meeting requested by Georgia was scheduled for Sunday afternoon.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged "all parties to immediately end hostilities and to engage, without delay, in negotiations to achieve a peaceful settlement," his office said in a statement late Saturday.

Georgia, a U.S. ally whose troops have been trained by American soldiers, launched the major offensive to regain control over South Ossetia overnight Friday. Heavy rocket and artillery fire and air strikes pounded the provincial capital, Tskhinvali.

Lavrov told reporters Saturday that some 1,500 people had been killed in South Ossetia since Friday, with the death toll rising. The figures could not be independently confirmed.

But Tskhinvali residents who survived the bombardment by hiding in basements and later fled the city estimated that hundreds of civilians had died. They said bodies were lying everywhere.

Utiashvili, the Georgian Interior Ministry spokesman, said the Georgian troops were still in control of Tskhinvali on Sunday morning but added that Russian troops were attacking the city from several directions.

A Russian general said Saturday that his troops had driven the Georgian troops out of the city, but another Russian officer, Maj. Gen. Marat Kulakhmetov, admitted in televised remarks Sunday that the fighting in the city was continuing.

Alexander Lomaia, secretary of Georgia's Security Council, estimated that Russia sent 2,500 troops into Georgia. The Russian military would not comment on the number of troops.

In Saturday's meeting with refugees in the city of Vladikavkaz across the border, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin described Georgia's actions as "complete genocide. Putin also said Georgia had effectively lost the right to rule the breakaway province - an indication Moscow could be preparing to fulfill South Ossetians' wish to be absorbed into Russia.

The risk of the conflict setting off a wider war also increased when Russian-supported separatists in another Georgia's breakaway region, Abkhazia, launched air and artillery strikes on Georgian troops to drive them out of a small part of the

province they control. The separatists told 15 U.N. military observers to evacuate.

Georgia's Foreign Ministry said the country was "in a state of war" and accused Russia of beginning a "massive military aggression." The Georgian parliament approved a state of martial law, mobilizing reservists and ordering government authorities to work round-the-clock.

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev said that Moscow sent troops into South Ossetia to protect its peacekeepers and civilians on a mission to "enforce peace." He said that Russia would seek to bring the Georgian attackers to criminal responsibility.

Medvedev said he was ordering the military prosecutor to document crimes against civilians in South Ossetia.

Georgia borders the Black Sea between Turkey and Russia and was ruled by Moscow for most of the two centuries preceding the breakup of the Soviet Union. Today, Russia has approximately 30 times more people than Georgia and 240 times the area.

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia have run their own affairs without international recognition since splitting from Georgia in the early 1990s and have built up ties with Moscow. Russia has granted its passports to most of their residents.

Russia also laid much of the responsibility for ending the fighting on Washington, which has trained Georgian troops. Washington, in turned, blamed Russia.

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said Bush had spoken with both Medvedev and Saakashvili. But it was unclear what might persuade either side to stop shooting - both claim the other violated a cease-fire declared Thursday.

Georgia said it has shot down 10 Russian planes, including four brought down Saturday, according to Lomaia. It also claimed to have captured two Russian pilots, who were shown on Georgian television.

Russian Col. Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy chief of the General Staff, confirmed Saturday that two Russian planes had been shot down, but did not say where or when.

Russian military commanders said 15 peacekeepers have been killed and about 150 wounded in South Ossetia, accusing Georgian troops of killing and wounding Russian peacekeepers when they seized Russian checkpoints. The allegations couldn't be independently confirmed.

Russia's Vesti 24 television reported that its crew of three were wounded in a Georgian shelling of a Russian military convoy near Tskhinvali which also left a Russian general wounded.

In Abkhazia, the separatist government said it intended to push Georgian forces out of the Kodori Gorge. The northern part of the gorge is the only area of Abkhazia that has remained under Georgian government control.

Lomaia, the Georgian security chief, said that Georgian administrative buildings and two villages in the Kodori Gorge were bombed, but he blamed the attack on Russia. He said there were no casualties.

Lomaia said that Russians also raided a Georgian military facility in the Zugdidi region just south of Abkhazia, inflicting no casualties.

---

Associated Press writers Misha Dzhindzhikhashvili in Tbilisi, Georgia; Douglas Birch on the Russian-Georgian border; George Abdaladze in Gori, Georgia; and Jim Heintz, Vladimir Isachenkov and Lynn Berry in Moscow contributed to this report.

© 2008 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed. Learn more about our Privacy Policy.