

# Report: Israeli Bombers Planned to Use Georgian Airfields in Iran Strike

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Israel of the Caucasus

Commentary: Israel of the Caucasus  
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 2 (UPI) -- NATO guarantees that an attack against one member country is an attack against all are no longer what they used to be. Had Georgia been inside NATO, a number of European countries would no longer be willing to consider it an attack against their own soil.

For Russia, the geopolitical stars were in perfect alignment. The United States was badly overstretched and had no plausible way to talk tough without coming across as empty rhetoric. American resources have been drained by the Iraq and Afghan wars, and the war on terror. As Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov put it, Washington must now choose between its "pet project" Georgia and a partnership with Moscow.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili evidently thought the United States would come to his side militarily if Russian troops pushed him back into Georgia after ordering an attack last Aug. 8 on the breakaway province of South Ossetia. And when his forces were mauled by Russia's counterattack, bitter disappointment turned to anger. Along with Abkhazia, Georgia lost two provinces.

Georgia also had a special relationship with Israel that was mostly under the radar. Georgian Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili is a former Israeli who moved things along by facilitating Israeli arms sales with U.S. aid. "We are now in a fight against the great Russia," he was quoted as saying, "and our hope is to receive assistance from the White House because Georgia cannot survive on its own."

The Jerusalem Post on Aug. 12 reported, "Georgian Prime Minister Vladimir Gurgenedze made a special call to Israel Tuesday morning to receive a blessing from one of the Haredi community's most important rabbis and spiritual leaders, Rabbi Aaron Leib Steinman. 'I want him to pray for us and our state,'" he was quoted.

Israel began selling arms to Georgia seven years ago. U.S. grants facilitated these purchases. From Israel came former minister and former Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo, representing Elbit Systems, and his brother Shlomo, former director general of Military Industries. Israeli UAV spy drones, made by Elbit Maarahot Systems, conducted recon flights over southern Russia, as well as into nearby Iran.

In a secret agreement between Israel and Georgia, two military airfields in southern Georgia had been earmarked for the use of Israeli fighter-bombers in the event of pre-emptive attacks against Iranian nuclear installations. This would sharply reduce the distance Israeli fighter-bombers would have to fly to hit targets in Iran. And to reach Georgian airstrips, the Israeli air force would fly over Turkey.

The attack ordered by Saakashvili against South Ossetia the night of Aug. 7 provided the Russians the pretext for Moscow to order Special Forces to raid these Israeli facilities where some Israeli drones were reported captured.

At a Moscow news conference, Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, Russia's deputy chief of staff, said the extent of Israeli aid to Georgia included "eight types of military vehicles, explosives, landmines and special explosives for clearing minefields." Estimated numbers of Israeli trainers attached to the Georgian army range from 100 to 1,000. There were also 110 U.S. military personnel on training assignments in Georgia. Last July 2,000 U.S. troops were flown in for "Immediate Response 2008," a joint exercise with Georgian forces.

Details of Israel's involvement were largely ignored by Israeli media lest they be interpreted as another blow to Israel's legendary military prowess, which took a bad hit in the Lebanese war against Hezbollah two years ago. Georgia's top diplomat in Tel Aviv complained about Israel's "lackluster" response to his country's military predicament and called for "diplomatic pressure on Moscow." According to the Jerusalem Post, the Georgian was told "the address for that type of pressure is Washington."

Haaretz reported Georgian Minister Temur Yakobashvili -- who is Jewish, the newspaper said -- told Israeli army radio

that "Israel should be proud of its military which trained Georgian soldiers" because he explained rather implausibly, "a small group of our soldiers were able to wipe out an entire Russian military division, thanks to Israeli training."

The Tel Aviv-Tbilisi military axis was agreed at the highest levels with the approval of the Bush administration. The official liaison between the two entities was Reserve Brig. Gen. Gal Hirsch who commanded Israeli forces on the Lebanese border in July 2006. He resigned from the army after the Winograd Commission flayed Israel's conduct of its Second Lebanon War. Hirsch was also blamed for the seizure of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah.

Israeli personnel, working for "private" companies with close ties to the Israel Defense Forces, also trained Georgian soldiers in house-to-house fighting.

That Russia assessed these Israeli training missions as U.S.-approved is a given. The United States was also handicapped by a shortage of spy-in-the-sky satellite capability, already overextended by the Iraq and Afghan wars. Neither U.S. nor Georgian intelligence knew Russian forces were ready with an immediate and massive response to the Georgian attack Moscow knew was coming. Russian double agents ostensibly working for Georgia most probably egged on the military fantasies of the impetuous Saakashvili's "surprise attack" plans.

Saakashvili was convinced that by sending 2,000 of his soldiers to serve in Iraq (who were immediately flown home by the United States when Russia launched a massive counterattack into Georgia), he would be rewarded for his loyalty. He could not believe President Bush, a personal friend, would leave him in the lurch. Georgia, as Saakashvili saw his country's role, was the "Israel of the Caucasus."

The Tel Aviv-Tbilisi military axis appears to have been cemented at the highest levels, according to YNet, the Israeli electronic daily. But whether the IAF can still count on those air bases to launch bombing missions against Iran's nuke facilities is now in doubt.

Iran comes out ahead in the wake of the Georgian crisis. Neither Russia nor China is willing to respond to a Western request for more and tougher sanctions against the mullahs. Iran's European trading partners are also loath to squeeze Iran. The Russian-built, 1,000-megawatt Iranian reactor in Bushehr is scheduled to go online early next year.

A combination of Putin and oil has put Russia back on the geopolitical map of the world. Moscow's oil and gas revenue this year is projected at \$201 billion -- a 13-fold increase since Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin eight years ago. Not shabby for a wannabe superpower on the comeback trail.

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 Georgia airfields earmarked for war on Iran  
 Wed, 03 Sep 2008 16:48:47 GMT

Georgia permitted Israel to use two military airfields for 'a potential pre-emptive strike' against Iranian nuclear sites, a report says.

The revelation came after Georgia's offensive into South Ossetia in early August prompted Russia to march its Special Forces into the region, United Press International reported.

Russian Special Forces raided the airfields - in addition to other Israeli facilities in southern Georgia -, where Israeli drones were captured.

According to the report, Israel had used the airfields to 'conduct recon flights over southern Russia, as well as into nearby Iran'.

"A secret agreement between Georgia and Israel had earmarked two military airfields in the south of Georgia for use by Israeli fighter-bombers in a potential pre-emptive strike against Iran," read the report.

Tel Aviv has threatened to launch air strikes against Iranian nuclear installations under the pretext that Tehran, a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has plans to develop nuclear weaponry.

This is while the UN nuclear watchdog has confirmed that Iran enriches uranium-235 to a level of 3.7 percent - a rate consistent with the construction of a nuclear power plant. Nuclear arms production requires an enrichment level of above 90 percent.

Iran currently suffers from electricity shortage and has been forced to adopt a rationing program by scheduling power

outages - of up to two hours a day - across both urban and rural areas in the country.

In early June, Israel conducted a military maneuver over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece in preparation, according to Pentagon officials, for an aerial bombardment of Iranian nuclear facilities.

Over 100 Israeli F-16s and F-15s partook in the exercise, which spanned some 900 miles, roughly the distance between their airfields and a nuclear enrichment facility in the central Iranian city of Natanz.

"(The Georgian airfields) would sharply reduce the distance Israeli fighter-bombers would have to fly to hit targets in Iran," continued the report.

Israel, in return, has been providing Georgia's pro-Western government with considerable amounts of training and armament for its military.

Georgian Minister of Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili, an Israeli citizen, said on August 10 that Israeli efforts to strengthen the Georgian army caused Russia 'enormous damage'.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared on August 13 that 'effective' Israeli weapons would ensure his country's success in the military conflict with Russia.

MD/AA

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=68368&sectionid=351020101>

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 Report: Israeli Bombers Planned to Use Georgian Airfields in Iran Strike  
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In part of what was termed Georgia's "special relationship" with Israel, UPI Editor at Large Arnaud de Borchgrave reported in a commentary today that a secret agreement between Georgia and Israel had earmarked two military airfields in the south of Georgia for use by Israeli fighter-bombers in a potential pre-emptive strike against Iran.

Israel has been a close ally of the Black Sea republic, and Israeli contractors have provided the Georgian military with considerable amounts of training and armament, much to the chagrin of Russia. Israeli companies have been arming the Georgian military for the past seven years, and ties have been further strengthened by the fact that Georgia's Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili is a former Israeli. Russian General Anatoly Nogovitsyn said Israel has provided Georgia with "eight types of military vehicles, explosives, landmines and special explosives".

In perhaps another signal for how key Georgia believes military support from Israel is, while most of the western media was running stories about Georgia being completely overrun by Russia's invasion earlier this month, Georgia's Minister of Reintegration was giving an interview to Israel's Army Radio. In it, he praised Israel's training of Georgia's soldiers, and credited it with Georgia's having inflicted "enormous damage" on Russia's military.

And while Israeli defense officials publicly announced a halt to military sales to Georgia earlier this month, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili denied that any halt had taken place. He also said "the Israeli weapons have proved very effective," and credited them with Georgia's military successes in the brief war with Russia.

Israeli-Russian relations had already been strained amid reports that Russia was planning to sell Iran its most advanced anti-aircraft missile system, which prompted a claim from the Israeli military that they were developing some "electronic warfare" means to neutralize what has become the backbone of Russian air defense. Iran's Foreign Ministry denied yesterday that they had purchased the system.

Another consequence of Israel's backing of Georgia came when long-time rival Syria praised Russia's military operations. This has led to talks of new arms sales to Syria, and a report that Russia will increase its naval presence in Syrian ports. Syria and Israel have been engaged in ongoing indirect peace talks, though those are at present delayed due to the resignation of Israel's top negotiator.

compiled by Jason Ditz

<http://news.antiwar.com/2008/09/02/report-israeli-bombers-planned-to-use-georgian-airfields-in-iran-strike/>

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American official says Russia is damaging Georgian airfields  
Aug 14, 2008

WASHINGTON &mdash; A U.S. official says that Russia apparently is sabotaging airfields and other military infrastructure in Georgia as its forces pull back.

The official described witnesses accounts for The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. This official said the Russian strategy seems like a deliberate attempt to cripple the already battered Georgian military.

The official also tells of reports from the scene indicating that retreating Russian forces are doing what they can to disable Georgia's ability to fight a future conflict.

<http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5gKKyTz3BvpjxEKM-qCUKly4u7IRg>

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Russian units raid Georgian airfields for use in Israeli strike against Iran &ndash; report  
DEBKAfile Special Report

September 5, 2008, 12:58 PM (GMT+02:00)

The raids were disclosed by UPI chief editor Arnaud de Borchgrave, who is also on the Washington Times staff, and picked up by the Iranian Fars news agency. The Russian raids of two Georgian airfields, which Tbilisi had allowed Israel to use for a potential strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, followed the Georgian offensive against South Ossetia on Aug. 7.

Under the secret agreement with Georgia, the airfields had been earmarked for use by Israeli fighter-bombers taking off to strike Iran in return for training and arms supplies.

DEBKAfile's intelligence sources report that flying from S. Georgia over the Caspian Sea to Iran would sharply trim the distance to be spanned by Israeli fighter-bombers, reducing flying time to 3.5 hours.

Northern Iran and the Tehran region, where most of the nuclear facilities are concentrated, would be within range, with no need to request US permission to pass through Iraq air space.

Russian Special Forces also raided other Israeli facilities in southern Georgia and captured Israeli spy drones, says the report.

Israel was said to have used the two airfields to &ldquo;conduct recon flights over southern Russia as well as into nearby Iran.&rdquo; The US intelligence sources quoted by UPI reported that the Russian force also carried home other Israeli military equipment captured at the air bases.

Our sources say that if the Russians got hold of an Israeli unmanned aerial vehicle complete with sophisticated electronic reconnaissance equipment, they will have secured some of the IDF's most secret devices for spying on Iran and Syria.

When this happened before, Russian military engineers quickly dismantled the equipment, studied it and passed the technology on to Tehran and Damascus.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5559>