

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2033
August 21, 2008

Europe's Catalogue of Failures in Georgia

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When Russia invaded Georgia on August 8, Europe's frozen conflicts were quickly brought out of the deep freeze. In an immense demonstration of Russia's military and political power, Moscow crushed Georgian defenses in South Ossetia and moved quickly into Georgia proper. As the European Union's (EU) biggest political figure and current President of the European Council, French President Nicholas Sarkozy quickly assumed control, negotiating a six-point ceasefire after visiting both capitals. However, Russia continues to flout the cease-fire agreement and divisions have emerged among Europe's capitals as how to approach Russia in the wake of this crisis.

President Sarkozy at the Helm. Visiting Tbilisi and Moscow, Sarkozy negotiated a cease-fire agreement whereby Russia would withdraw its troops from Georgia on August 18. Under the vague terms of the cease-fire, Russia has said that an unspecified number of soldiers will be allowed to stay on sovereign Georgian territory for peacekeeping purposes in a "buffer zone" outside South Ossetia. Containing no enforcement mechanisms, the cease-fire agreement was fatally flawed from the beginning. Therefore, it should come as little surprise that Russia failed to live up to its obligations and withdraw its troops on August 18. It has since moved SS-21 ballistic missiles—which are capable of hitting Tbilisi—into South Ossetia, destroyed ships in the Georgian port of Poti, and bombed a vital railway.¹ Russia also rejected a French-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution that called on Moscow to go back to its pre-war position. Moscow has said that it is determined to keep its troops inside Georgia

proper and that it no longer recognizes Georgia's territorial integrity.²

It is highly probable that Tbilisi signed the cease-fire agreement under European pressure and assurances by Sarkozy that an eventual peace agreement would ensure a Russian retreat to its pre-war position. However, it looks increasingly as if the cease-fire agreement has contributed to Moscow's confidence that it can redraw Georgia's borders, as it has bluntly stated that it will not return to the status quo ante. In fact, Russia rejected the U.N. resolution and put forward its own resolution, citing the terms of the cease-fire that it should be allowed troops on Georgian soil.³

Thus far, the EU has handled this crisis poorly. Sarkozy negotiated the cease-fire on Moscow's terms, providing no enforcement mechanisms and thereby assuring Russia will implement the terms (if at all) at its leisure. By allowing Russia to contravene the cease-fire, the EU has sent Russia the message that the worst it can expect is a slap on the wrist and that its actions will likely go unpunished. If Europe wanted to demonstrate strength, resolve, and leadership, it should have deferred leadership of this crisis to one of its Central or Eastern European powers who understand the region better.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2033.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
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The Joint Presidential Declaration of Poland and the Baltic Nations, which condemned Russia's action in unequivocal terms immediately after the outbreak of the crisis, now stands in stark contrast to the softly-softly, failed approach of France and Germany.

The EU can still have leverage if it so desires. As EU spokesman Martin Selmayr said, "We can't send stormtroopers, but we have a trade and economic policy we can discuss. We are an economic force."⁴ The EU should hold the emergency summit threatened by Sarkozy last week, withdraw its support for Russia's membership of the World Trade Organization, and halt any negotiation of an EU-Russian trade and investment treaty.

U.K.: MIA. With Tony Blair's departure from Downing Street, Britain lost its star performer on the international stage, and America lost a strong and trusted friend in Europe. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has shown little interest in foreign affairs and has made no significant contribution regarding the crisis in Georgia. A beleaguered Brown has allowed Sarkozy and the EU to call the shots on Britain's behalf and only dispatched the foreign secretary to Tbilisi long after other European leaders had made the trip and the agenda had already been set.

There are some welcome signs, however, that the U.K. will quickly return to the foreign policy stage after the next election. David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, steered a steady ship when responding to the crisis. He made a symbolic gesture by pulling his MPs out of their alliance with Putin-aligned parliamentarians in the Council of

Europe. Cameron also flew to Tbilisi *before* the British foreign secretary, he called for Russia to be expelled from the G-8, and he has stated that the European Union should defer its negotiations on a privileged partnership with Russia.⁵ In an op-ed in the influential *Times* newspaper, he asked flatly: "Russia's actions have laid down a formidable challenge to the West.... The question is simple: Will the West step up to the plate?" With a virtually unassailable lead in the polls, Cameron's leadership on this issue is a positive sign of what the United States can expect from a future Conservative government.

NATO. In an extraordinary meeting of NATO foreign ministers on August 19, some positive steps were taken to demonstrate solidarity with Georgia. However, collectively these steps fall short of standing up to Russia in any significant way. In fact, Moscow's ambassador to NATO derided the outcomes of the summit as a "mountain that gave birth to a mouse."⁶

The following three primary decisions were taken by NATO:

1. NATO–Russia Council (NRC) meetings will be put on hold, freezing direct contact between NATO and Moscow;
2. A NATO–Georgia Commission, a joint commission offering enhanced cooperation between NATO and Georgia, was established; and
3. Russia must withdraw its troops to their positions pre-crisis, the status quo ante.

The NATO statement is a shot across Russia's bow and significantly expressed support for Geor-

1. "NATO cools ties with Russia without freezing them," EurActive, August 20, 2008 at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/nato-cools-ties-russia-freezing/article-174787?Ref=RSS> (August 21, 2008).
2. "Russia rejects UN Georgia draft," BBC News, August 20, 2008 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7571506.stm> (August 21, 2008).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Jeanne Whalen, "Russian Forces Outline Plans For Major Military Presence," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121923076375956371.html> (August 21, 2008).
5. Andrew Sparrow, "David Cameron to pull out of partnership with Russian party," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2008, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/aug/20/conservatives.foreignpolicy> (August 21, 2008).
6. Adrian Blomfield, "Russia rejects UN call to pull out of Georgia," *Daily Telegraph*, August 20, 2008, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/2588902/Russia-rejects-UN-call-to-pull-out-of-Georgia.html> (August 21, 2008).

gia's "democratically elected government."⁷ However, a more robust response would have been to accelerate Georgian (and Ukrainian) accession to the Membership Action Plan (MAP). Moscow successfully pressured Germany to form a coalition to deny Georgian and Ukrainian accession to MAP at NATO's Bucharest Summit in April 2008. In a shameful act of appeasement, Chancellor Angela Merkel led a Franco-German coalition to defer Georgia's accession to MAP until December 2008 in a failed attempt to avoid "provoking" Russia. This act reversed the previous German position supporting an open-door policy for NATO and stood in direct contrast to President Bush's visible support for Kiev and Tbilisi at the summit.⁸ Chancellor Merkel's recent trip to Tbilisi, where she publicly affirmed Germany's support for Georgia's membership in NATO, should ring hollow in light of their previous actions. President Saakashvili should also bear in mind that Merkel's predecessor, Gerhard Schroder, is now a Gazprom employee who described President Putin as a "flawless democrat" while occupying the chancellery.⁹

Russia did not mislead Europe at the Bucharest Summit with regard to its aggressive intentions toward Georgia and Ukraine. For the first time since the NRC was created in 2002, President Vladimir Putin attended the annual NATO summit, primarily to intimidate and threaten Georgia and Ukraine. He even threatened to aim nuclear missiles at Ukraine if it sought NATO membership.¹⁰

The NRC was created in 2002 to "serve as the principal structure and venue for advancing the relationship between NATO and Russia."¹¹ Russia's

invasion of a sovereign nation with clear Euro-Atlantic aspirations stands in complete violation of the spirit and principles of the NRC. Merely suspending its meetings do not go far enough, and Russia has already responded by cutting off all military cooperation with NATO. Combined with the European Union's economic clout, NATO has the political and military wherewithal to matter in this conflict. Russia must be given the message that NATO unequivocally supports Georgia in this crisis and that its actions will not be tolerated. This must be done by accelerating Georgian and Ukrainian accession to the MAP and rejecting the continued use of Russian troops as peacekeepers in the region.

The West must also take the following additional measures:

- A new, international peacekeeping force must be created to preside over South Ossetia, probably under the supervision of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;
- Russian troops must not be allowed on sovereign Georgian territory; and
- The West must collectively offer resources and aid to Georgia as it rebuilds its damaged infrastructure.

Russia's Geo-Strategic Ambitions. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is correct that Russia's reputation on the international stage has been badly damaged by this crisis as well as its failure to adhere to the agreed upon cease-fire. However, it is unlikely that Moscow cared much about its reputation when it engaged in this old-fashioned big-power politics. Moscow has provoked a confronta-

7. John Thornhill and Stanley Pignal, "NATO tells Russia: no 'new line' in Europe," *Financial Times*, August 20, 2008, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0091248e-6e19-11dd-b5df-0000779fd18c.html> (August 21, 2008).

8. German Minister of Defense Franz-Josef Jung stated in February 2008: "NATO is not only a military alliance. It was and still is a community based on values. Our door is open to those who are prepared to adopt the principles that govern our Alliance." Franz-Josef Jung, "The World in Disarray—Shifting Powers, Lack of Strategies," Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 8, 2008, at www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2008=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=203 (March 17, 2008).

9. "Schroder on Georgia," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 2008, at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121909625567750941.html?mod=googlenews_wsj (August 21, 2008).

10. Peter Finn, "Putin Threatens Ukraine on NATO," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2008, p. A8, at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021201658.html (August 21, 2008).

11. NATO, "Topics: NATO-Russia Council," at <http://www.nato.int/issues/nrc/index.html> (August 21, 2008).

tion with Europe and America in Georgia, and it is one that cannot be ignored or go unpunished. It is true that Washington has important goals to achieve elsewhere in the world that would benefit from Moscow's cooperation. However, it is improbable that the United States can count on Russian cooperation, especially if Russian national interest is not explicitly involved. In both its symbolism and real-

ity, the war in Georgia is a signal of Russia's geo-strategic ambitions and a preview of what the West can expect from Moscow in the future.

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