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## **The Georgian Problem and the Russian Juggernaut**

By

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The second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Georgia on August 8, 2008 was bereft of adequate public attention.<sup>i</sup> However, on August 11, 2010, Russia's Air Force Commander-in-Chief, Colonel-General Alexander Zelin, announced at a press conference in Moscow that S-300 anti-aircraft missiles have been deployed in separatist Abkhazia, which Moscow has recognised as independent since August 2008.<sup>ii</sup> The S-300 missile system reinforced Moscow's military presence in the disputed territory and drew an irate response from Georgia. General Alexander Zelin stated that air defences of other types had been deployed in Georgia's other Russian-backed rebel region, South Ossetia.<sup>iii</sup> His comments, two years after Russia routed Georgian forces in a five-day war that strained Moscow's ties with the United States and Europe, were reported by Russian news agencies. Zelin said the air defence systems would also protect Russian bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>iv</sup>

Two years have passed since the fateful invasion of Georgia. However, even after the watershed event, Russia not only maintains a heavy military presence in the occupied

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regions, but has significantly advanced her strategic capabilities. The political process that was undertaken to solve Tbilisi's outstanding security problems at Geneva has yielded few significant results and the ceasefire agreement signed through the mediation of the European Union seems to have lapsed into slothful oblivion. Further, Georgia lives under an operational arms embargo which leaves her extremely vulnerable to yet another Russian invasion.<sup>v</sup>

The announcement of the missile deployment came three days after Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, accompanied by Anatoly Serdyukov, his defence minister, visited Abkhazia. Tbilisi condemned both Medvedev's visit and the S-300 deployment as "cynical" moves aimed at "destabilizing the situation" and "escalating tension in the Caucasus region," and called on the international community "to force Russia to respect the universally recognized norms and principles of the international law and to unconditionally fulfill the commitments under the six-point [ceasefire] Agreement."<sup>vi</sup>

On August 12, which marked the second anniversary of the ceasefire between Russia and Georgia, Tbilisi came up with yet another statement accusing Moscow of being in gross violation of all six points of the agreement.<sup>vii</sup> "Instead of fulfilling the commitments," the statement read, "Russia is continuously increasing the military presence on the occupied territories of Georgia and is building the military bases in order to ensure its illegal presence on the ground (5 military bases [and], approximately, 10,000 military personnel.)" Besides, Russia does not allow the only international force on the ground – the European Union's Monitoring Mission (EUMM) – created under the auspices of the agreement "to thoroughly fulfill its mandate and have access to Georgia's occupied territories."<sup>viii</sup> By creating and strengthening its military capabilities in Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Russia seemed to be violating not only the ceasefire agreement but certain fundamental principles of international law as well, including those adopted within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty.<sup>ix</sup>

The US and NATO have remained silent on the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Georgia. The US State Department had not planned to make any statement until spokesman P.J. Crowley responded to incessant questions posed by journalists. He cited Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's, recent visit to Georgia, her declared support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and her call to Russia to recognise its commitments under the armistice agreement. However, the spokesman refrained from using the term "occupation," although Clinton had officially introduced that term during her Georgia visit, as the official expression of US policy henceforth.<sup>x</sup> On August 11, the same spokesman had to mellow down the Russian S-300 deployment as not necessarily confirmed and not necessarily a new development. The US Ambassador in Tbilisi, John Bass, also omitted the word occupation from his statement on the S-300 deployment.<sup>xi</sup>

NATO<sup>xii</sup> has also maintained silence in the face of dramatic changes with regard to the status-quo in the Black Sea-South Caucasus region in Russia's favour in the last two years. During its July 12 meeting, NATO decided in advance that there would be no meetings of the NATO-Georgia<sup>xiii</sup> and NATO-Ukraine Commissions at the alliance's Lisbon summit.<sup>xiv</sup> Meanwhile, Russian military power has been cementing and growing beyond Russia's borders in the Black Sea-South Caucasus region, from Ukraine's Crimea to Georgia's occupied territories to Armenia. US and NATO obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan have paved the way for Russian re-expansion in Europe's East, in the process tacitly supporting the possible future onslaught of the Russian bear.

In conclusion, it may be stated that Russia's overtures into Georgia and surrounding areas need to be taken into account if a possible future invasion is to be avoided. It is not only the responsibility of the International Community, but also that of International Organisations such as the UN, the EU and the NATO to formulate a permanent long term solution with regard to the volatile relations harboured between Georgia and Russia. Unless an effective system of containment is implemented it may be difficult to hinder the wheels of the Russian Juggernaut from rolling back over known territories with renewed vitality.

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<sup>i</sup> Refer to an earlier article: Bandyopadhyay, Lopamudra, "Russia's Overtures into Georgia: Signs of a New Cold War?" *Global India Foundation*, accessed electronically at

<http://www.globalindiafoundation.org/world%20politics.htm>, on August 12, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Socor, Vladimir, "Russia Deploys S-300 Air Defense Systems in Abkhazia," *Georgian Daily*, August 2010, accessed electronically at

[http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19689&Itemid=132](http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19689&Itemid=132), on August 13, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Solovyov, Dmitry, "Russia Deploys Missiles to Protect Georgia Rebels," *Reuters*, August 12, 2010, accessed electronically at <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-50781020100811>, on August 13, 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> Russia accused Georgia of "aggressively re-arming", and claimed that it was preparing for a new war, which Georgia denied. On 1 October 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a law making it illegal for Russian citizens to sell, supply, or transfer arms, military technology, or equipment to Georgia, and prohibiting the use of Russian railways, waters, and airspace for military co-operation with Georgia. The law also states that economic sanctions may be imposed on any states or organisations delivering military products to Georgia, and the restricting or terminating military, technical, and economic co-operation with these states would be considered. The sanctions are to last until December 2011. Russia had earlier tried to have an International arms embargo on Georgia imposed, but the initiative failed to meet widespread International support.

<sup>vi</sup> Iberi, David, "Russia's Advances Expose Georgia's Vulnerabilities," *Jamestown Foundation Blog*, August 13, 2010, accessed electronically at <http://www.jamestown.org/blog/>, on August 16, 2010.

<sup>vii</sup> Bocharov Ruchei, Sochi, "President Medvedev signed a plan to resolve the Georgian-South Ossetia conflict, based on the six principles previously agreed on," *President of Russia, Official Web Portal*, August 16, 2008, accessed electronically at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/news/2008/08/205406.shtml>, on August 14, 2010.

<sup>viii</sup> Iberi, *op.cit.*

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>x</sup> Socor, Vladimir, "Russia Calls for Arms Embargo on Georgia After War's Second Anniversary," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 7 Issue: 157, August 13, 2010, accessed electronically at

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=36747&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=674eec5ac4](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36747&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=674eec5ac4), on August 16, 2010.

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<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xii</sup> For details on NATO-Georgia Relations refer to the NATO web site, accessed electronically at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_38988.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_38988.htm), on August 23, 2010.

<sup>xiii</sup> On September 15, 2008 a NATO-Georgia Commission was established.

<sup>xiv</sup> On April 4, 2009, the NATO heads of state released a joint statement after the Strasbourg–Kehl summit, pledging to maximise their advice, assistance and support for Georgia's and Ukraine's reform efforts. The statement reiterated that the two countries will become NATO members, but did not specify the time. It reaffirmed NATO's “continued support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders”. The statement said that Russia has not completely complied with its commitments undertaken under the August 12 and September 8 ceasefire accords and called for Moscow to reverse its recognition of Georgia's breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Refer to: NATO Press Release: (2009) 044, April 4, 2009, accessed electronically at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease), on August 23, 2010.