



GEORGIA

10 Years After War, Russia Warns Of 'Horrible' Conflict If Georgia Joins NATO

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By RFE/RL

Ten years after Russia and Georgia went to war, the West on August 7 condemned Moscow's continued military presence in the Caucasus country's territory and reiterated support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Earlier, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev issued a stern warning to NATO that Georgia's joining the Western military alliance could lead to a "horrible" new conflict.

Medvedev said in an interview with the Kommersant FM radio station on August 6 that NATO's plans to eventually offer membership to Georgia are "absolutely irresponsible" and a "threat to peace."

Late on August 7, 2008, Georgian troops rolled into the Russia-backed breakaway region of South Ossetia in an attempt to reclaim the territory from what Tbilisi said was growing Russian militarization.

The conflict erupted into a five-day war in which Russian forces drove deep into Georgia before pulling back in the wake of a European Union-brokered peace agreement.

The conflict, which Tbilisi and Moscow accuse one another of starting, left hundreds dead and drove thousands from their homes.

After the war, Russia left thousands of troops in South Ossetia and another breakaway region, Abkhazia, and recognized both as independent countries.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the conflict, Georgia and the United States on August 7 condemned Russia's continued "occupation" of Georgian territory.

"This is a war against Georgia, an aggression, an occupation, and a blatant violation of international law," Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili said during a meeting attended by the foreign ministers of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and a Ukrainian deputy prime minister.

"The aggressor's appetite has only increased after the invasion," he added.

The "aggression" against Georgia did not start in August 2008, but much earlier, in 1991-1992, the Georgian president also said, when "Russia detached two regions from the Georgian central authorities by means of hybrid war."

'Georgia's Sovereign Choice'

In a joint statement, the Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian ministers called on the international community to continue to demand that Russia "fully and without any further delay implements its international commitments and starts honoring international law and the right of sovereign neighboring states to choose their own destiny."

They also expressed "strong support for Georgia's sovereign choice to pursue the ultimate goal of membership in the EU and NATO."

Last month, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, reiterated support for Georgia's membership at a meeting in Brussels, but did not mention when that could happen.

Before the Russia-Georgia war, Russian officials had made clear that they vehemently opposed Georgia's efforts to achieve NATO membership.

"Ten years of occupation is ten years too long," the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi said in a statement.

"We will continue to work together with the Government and the people of Georgia and with our friends and allies to ensure the world's continued support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," it also said, adding, "Georgia, we are with you."

The European Union **praised the truce deal** putting an end to the fighting and called the continuing Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a "violation of international law" and the agreement.

"The European Union reiterates its firm support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders," a statement said.

In an interview with Current Time TV on August 6, Mikheil Saakashvili, who was Georgia's president at the time of the 2008 conflict, said that Russia's motive in the war was to attack "Georgian statehood."

Saakashvili said that Moscow was concerned because reforms had made the South Caucasus country a "role model" for others in the region.

With reporting by AP, AFP, and dpa
