

**A POSSIBLE US DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE**  
**TO UNFREEZE AND DEFUSE GEORGIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS**

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Georgia-Russia relations are not just frozen—they’re volatile in ways that could exacerbate current and prospective dangers regionally and globally. The deadlock over Russia occupation and virtual annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia already ....

- constitutes an on-going violation of international law;
- highlights the worst, most atavistic, geopolitically assertive trends in Russian domestic and foreign policy;
- complicates Russia’s relations with the U.S, EU countries, and Russia’s neighbors
- hinders Presidents Obama and Medvedev’s joint aspiration for Russia to join the WTO, post-NST progress on arms control in general and CFE in particular and the prospects for strengthening U.S. and allied security interests in general.
- undercuts Russia’s credibility as a European democracy in good standing and worthy of further integration into Euroatlantic and global institutions.

The aftermath of the Georgia-Russia conflict of August 2008 also has the potential to blow up into another conflict between Georgia and Russia and—even short of another outright war—spread instability and political violence in the Caucasus (North and South).

Moreover, the situation, if it remains frozen and dangerous, poses a domestic political challenge as well. The Administration’s ability to influence Russia’s behavior in Georgia has become a litmus test of the “reset.” For many in Congress and elsewhere, the President’s efforts to get Russia into the WTO, strengthen the OSCE and European security, and move onto next stage of conventional arms control will be judged on whether the U.S. is, simultaneously, able to advance the economic and security interests of Georgia as democratic NATO aspirant. Conversely, any appearance of U.S. pressure on Georgia to accept Moscow’s dismemberment of the country will erode support for the “reset” in U.S.-Russia relations, including potentially imperiling ratification of the New Start Treaty and the 123 agreement.

In this adversity there is an opportunity for the US to broker improved communication between Moscow and Tbilisi, perhaps enabling them to reduce current tensions over the territories and make progress on practical economic, humanitarian and security concerns, potentially improving the prospects for a longer term process of normalization and viable negotiations regarding the restoration of Georgian sovereignty.

The inter-state conflict is rooted in deep personal animosities at the leadership level in Moscow and Tbilisi, a factor that is further complicated by the dynamics within the Russian leadership (Putin’s close association with the August 2008 invasion). Because the two leaderships are not talking to each other—or, when they do, the situation tends to get worse—the essence of the US initiative would have to be a shuttle between Tbilisi and Moscow.

The near-term goal of the initiative would be to persuade the two principal and legitimate parties, Georgia and Russia, that they have an interest in taking the following steps in three areas:

1. Humanitarian: alleviation of the displacement that was a consequence of occupation/annexation, opening of borders for family visitation and people to people exchanges.
2. Economic: loosening of economic/commercial relations between and among the two countries and the occupied territories (including by establishing a consensual customs regime on Georgia's Abkhaz and South Ossetia borders with Russia).
3. Security: resumption of confidence-building and crisis-management measures (including CFE style transparency and CSBMs regarding Russian forces, Open Skies flights, international/OSCE monitoring in the territories), reinvigoration of negotiating channels on consensual security arrangements for the longer term (Geneva talks or another forum) and transparency/CSBMs regarding U.S.-Georgian military-military relations.

Under the rubric of security, it would be crucial that the US (and the international community) explicitly reaffirm and adhere to nonrecognition of the two entities and to insistence on the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity, recognizing that Russia will adhere to its own position.

Modernizing CFE and getting the Russians back into conventional arms control compliance are vital to stability, predictability and confidence in Europe and to fulfilling the vision of a post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic Community which includes Russia and its neighbors into a sustainable, increasingly integrated and cooperative zone of peace. The CFE principle of host-nation consent to the stationing of foreign forces would remain nonnegotiable even as the U.S. sets aside for later our disagreement about the ultimate legal status of the territories. Our longer term goal in CFE is to reestablish consensual security arrangements in the territories, not to settle non-arms control questions like legal status.

Indeed, the measures agreed in all three areas above would be taken *without prejudice* to the final settlement on the territorial and legal issues. "Without prejudice" leaves the issue of end state open but maintains the opening and continuing US, Georgian, NATO and EU positions intact with regard to what the legal end state should be if Russia is to have truly "normal" relations with its neighbors and with the international community.

If there can be movement in these three areas, it might be possible to unlock other issues as well, including WTO for Russia and the beginning of movement on CFE along the lines of the NATO proposal.

Both as a matter of principle and US domestic politics—and as a matter of the logic of the situation—it is essential that the security dimension be integral to the strategy and execution. Security is at the core of the whole problem: Russian troops have, for the first time in the post-Soviet period, invaded, occupied, and brought under the control of Moscow the territory of a foreign country. While reversing that situation will probably take years, the goal of doing so must be part of whatever diplomacy occurs now. And

that diplomacy is simply beyond the capability and attitudes of the Georgian and Russian leaderships.

It will be critical to keep key allies—especially France, Germany, Britain (and Turkey?)—closely consulted throughout, as well as the EU/Ashton and NATO. But the initiative should be US only, and not get bogged down with all the other interested parties appointing their own co-mediators.

Now that the Administration is on record—via the Summers public statements in Moscow last week—advocating and predicting that Russia will be in the WTO “well before” the passage of 12 months, the initiative should be planned as soon as possible. The President might propose it, first, to Medvedev face-to-face in Yokohama on [November 14?] and then to Saakashvili on [November 20?] in Lisbon. The initiative would have the status and support of a presidential mission, with the special representative reporting to the President through Secretary of State, with the diplomacy to begin in January with the goal of determining by the summer the prospects for success.