



## Georgia: Our Next Entangling Alliance?

Georgia's American-backed "Rose Revolution" in 2003 overthrew autocrat and Soviet holdover Eduard Shevardnadze and replaced him with Mikheil Saakashvili, a staunch American ally. It was Saakashvili who had a street in the Georgian capital Tbilisi renamed for George W. Bush; Saakashvili also sent several thousand Georgian troops to fight in Iraq alongside the United States.



Unfortunately, Saakashvili recently decided to challenge Russia for supremacy in the former Georgian territory of South Ossetia (North Ossetia is a part of the Russian Federation). The Ossetians, descendants of the Roman-era Alans, speak a language related to Iranian and are strongly pro-Russia. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, South Ossetia, with the backing of Russia, declared its independence from Georgia (as did Abkhazia, another non-Georgian ethnic enclave). Without formally recognizing the independence of either region, Russia sent peacekeeping troops to forestall civil war, and Georgia has existed in three de facto separate parts ever since.

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In the wake of Russia's swift victory over the U.S.-trained and supplied Georgian military, Moscow has made it clear that Georgia will not be permitted to re-assert territoriality over either of the breakaway republics. Georgia, having provoked the conflict, is now crying foul and doing its level best to enlist the military support of the United States and other sympathetic Western governments.

While it seems unlikely that the United States or any other Western power will risk nuclear war with Russia over a brush fire in the Caucasus, the Georgian war highlights the foolishness of America's continued membership in NATO two decades after the end of the Cold War. Because of their NATO membership, America is also treaty-bound to the likes of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland, all of which border on Russia. Had Georgia successfully sued for entry into NATO before the South Ossetia debacle, we might well be at war right now with Moscow over a piece of Caucasian real estate irrelevant to the security of the United States.



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