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Clash in the Caucasus: Georgia, Russia, and the Fate of South Ossetia

by Stephen Jones



This young girl is a refugee from South Ossetia, one of the areas hit by the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia. The photo is a reminder that, in addition to its impact on the international politics, the short Russian-Georgian war has come with a marked human cost as well.

Editor's Note:

The brief war in Georgia in August 2008 has ushered in a new era in international relations—although likely not the "new cold war" that so many analysts have rushed to declare. In this month's article, Stephen F. Jones, one of the world's foremost specialists on Georgia, explores the origins of this summer's fighting. The war's main protagonists—Georgians, Ossetians, Abkhaz, and Russians—have had a long and tangled history, made worse by the swirling nationalism that accompanied the break-up of the Soviet Union, the promise of free-flowing petrodollars, and Russia's international resurgence.

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politics, see the [March 2008 *Origins* article](#) on Russia's Presidential elections.

On August 7th, 2008, just before midnight, Georgian forces launched an attack on Tskhinvali, the provincial capital of South Ossetia, or what Georgians call Samachablo. Georgia claimed it was responding to a Russian invasion. Russia, whose troops surged immediately and rapidly into Georgia, claimed the Georgians attacked first.

A small mountainous territory on the southern side of the Caucasus range (population around 100,000 in 1989, and 3,900 square kilometers), South Ossetia seceded from Georgia in 1992 in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since its unilateral declaration of independence, South Ossetia has survived but with no permanent resolution of its status. It is officially part of Georgia, unrecognized until recently by anyone in the international community. It has its own government, though largely staffed by Russian state employees, and its security is assured by Russian troops stationed in the region, erroneously described as "peacekeepers."

Over the past sixteen years, South Ossetia has been a "frozen conflict" with occasional flashes of violence. Tensions among Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia grew, however, after the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as

Georgia's President in 2004. Saakashvili, young (36 at the time of his election) and an enthusiastic state-builder, promised to restore Georgian territorial unity. Over the last four years he has attempted to unfreeze the conflict by both diplomacy and military threats. He has presented a number of plans for South Ossetian autonomy, which have been regularly dismissed by the South Ossetian government as too little too late. In the days and weeks leading up to August 7th, fighting intensified between South Ossetian irregulars supported by Russian "peacekeepers" and U.S.-trained Georgian units.

During August 7th, Georgian and Ossetian leaders made plans to meet and defuse the situation. Temuri Yakobishvili, the Georgian State Minister of Reintegration, traveled to Tskhinvali to meet his South Ossetian counterparts, who did not turn up. Saakashvili made a speech offering South Ossetia "unlimited autonomy," which would be guaranteed by Russia.

However, that night Georgia launched an artillery barrage and a ground assault of infantry and tanks on Tskhinvali. The Georgian government declared it was acting as any sovereign and independent state would to defend itself against violent secessionists and Russian aggression. South Ossetians accused Georgia of perfidy.

Moscow's response to the Georgian attack was fast—so fast according to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that she thought it pre-planned and premeditated. Tanks and troops poured across Georgian borders, picking up South Ossetian militia along the way. The Georgian army retreated under intense artillery and air strikes on its positions in Tskhinvali.

Russian troops quickly crossed over from the demarcated conflict zones in South Ossetia where they had operated with official UN sanction as peacekeepers since 1992. They drove deep into Georgian territory, occupying Gori (the birthplace of Joseph Stalin), the vital Georgian port of Poti on the Black Sea coast, and many other towns.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, in Beijing for the Olympics at the time of the Russian attack, returned to Vladikavkaz in the Russian province of North Ossetia to oversee operations. Putin had bitter relations with President Saakashvili, and may have felt a personal stake in teaching him and Georgia a lesson.

The Georgian attack caused significant damage in South Ossetia, although arguments continue as to how severe. One Ossetian interpreter in Tskhinvali reported on August 10 that he was standing in the city center, "but there's no city left." Later [UNOSAT](#) imagery suggests around 5-6% of the city was destroyed, though predominantly in residential areas.

There are arguments too over casualties. The *casus belli* for the Russian invasion was Georgian "genocide" against the South Ossetian population, a claim that was subsequently shown to be greatly exaggerated. Current estimates (many civilians remain missing) are between 1,000-1,200 dead on both sides. Both Georgians and South Ossetians suffered horribly and fled their homes, but in the end it was mostly Georgian villages that were ethnically cleansed.

Immediately following the Russian thrust into Georgia through South Ossetia, Russian-backed forces in Georgia's other "frozen conflict" in Abkhazia—another secessionist region that had won de facto independence from Tbilisi in 1993, but had remained unrecognized by the international community—pushed Georgian villagers and soldiers out of the Kodori Gorge. This is part of Abkhazia that the Georgians had continued to govern after their defeat in 1993.

The United States—an active ally of Georgia and its American-educated President (Saakashvili gained a law degree from Columbia University)—passed a Congressional resolution defending Georgia's right to territorial integrity and condemned the Russians' illegal occupation of Georgia. After quickly helping 2,000 Georgian troops—that had been supporting U.S. forces in Iraq—to return to defend their state, President Bush offered Georgia \$1 billion in humanitarian aid and assistance and continued to put pressure on Russia to withdraw.

On August 26th, Russia officially recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent sovereign states—the first country in the world to do so (Nicaragua, thus far, is the only other country to follow suit). The Russian leadership cited the precedent of Kosovo, which many Western states had recognized following Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in February, 2008. Jubilant Ossetians and Abkhazians spilled onto the streets, waving flags, firing guns, and honking car-horns in celebration.

The question is what drove President Saakashvili to use military force to regain Georgian lands when the Russian army was standing in readiness across the border? This will be a central debate in Georgia and around the world in the months to come. Whatever the answer, a Rubicon was crossed on August 7th.

A Small War with Big Repercussions

This brief one-sided war, which lasted only five days and ended in Georgian military defeat, will have wide and lasting implications not only for the people and politics of the region, but for international relations more generally.

The military conflict will have a serious impact on Russian-U.S. and Russian-European Union (E.U.) relations. It may not presage a new Cold War or the threat of a Third World War as some have suggested. Russia is too weak for that, and neither the U.S. nor the E.U. is willing to completely isolate Russia. But the conflict demonstrates a major shift in the Eurasian geopolitical map.

Russia's invasion of Georgia showed up the West's weakness: the uncertainty within NATO about its commitment to Georgia and Ukraine; the E.U.'s reluctance to jeopardize the steady stream of oil and gas from Russia; and the United States' limited capacity to extend a hand to allies in unstable regions for fear of being dragged into expensive foreign policy commitments.

For all this, however, Russia should not get too over-confident. Its successes this summer came as a result of a declining and preoccupied U.S., rising oil prices that have shored up Russian revenues, and an E.U. dependent on Russian energy. In reality, as the collapse of the Russian stock market showed in August, its economy is deeply vulnerable to external shocks.

The August war will affect all former Soviet republics. Russia has reclaimed its sphere of influence, and Russia's neighbors have taken notice. This is particularly true for countries like Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have their own "frozen conflicts" to deal with; and for Ukraine and Kazakhstan, which are seeking closer ties to the West and have large Russian minorities that can be leveraged by Russia. To a certain degree, Russia has reenacted the Soviet policy of "Finlandization," a post-World War II strategy of intimidation that the USSR used to emasculate Finland's independent foreign policy.

The Ossetian conflict will lead to major repercussions for Russian and Georgian domestic politics. The war represents a decisive defeat for the few liberal reformers in Russia who had hoped President Medvedev would reverse Russia's authoritarian direction. Russia's military, with a victory (albeit against a much smaller state), has strengthened its position in Russian domestic politics. [For more on contemporary Russian politics, see our

[March 2008 *Origins* article](#) on this year's Presidential elections].

Georgian domestic politics will be in for turmoil once the patriotic rallying behind President Saakashvili ends. Economically, Russia has set back the high growth Georgian economy (10-12% annual GDP since 2004). It has made investors think twice about further development of oil and gas transit across the Caucasus—like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which currently carries one million barrels per day and in which U.S. companies are heavily invested. Russia wants no competition to its own pipeline network.

More significantly, August 7th has forced international organizations and world leaders to reconsider the slippery concepts of self-determination, human rights, and national sovereignty. In particular, Russian actions have challenged the role and capacity of both international law and Western powers to deal with these issues. It shows us that force (and the privilege of great powers to use it) remains ascendant despite all declarations of a new world order.

The war also underlined continuing confusion in the international community over minority rights and the link between self-determination and independence. It raised—as did Kosovo—the question of territorial integrity of UN member states: under what conditions should peoples be allowed to secede from states, what is the mechanism for secession, what actions can states legitimately take to prevent secession? Furthermore, can states grant citizenship to "co-ethnics" or others abroad, as Russia did to the South Ossetians and Abkhazians? Russia's policy highlights the potential abuses of the UN approved principle of "responsibility to protect," and underlines the danger of authorizing the presence of regional peacekeepers in conflicts where they have national security interests.

Why this war?

The international context—Russian, U.S. and E.U. relations; the question of NATO expansion; changes in the global oil economy—is key to explaining the origins and consequences of this conflict. At the same time, we must come to grips with the history of interethnic relations in Georgia. The history of Georgian-South Ossetian relations have largely been forgotten in the media's speculation about the invasion's global ramifications. The August events did not signify the beginning of conflict, but its culmination.

Let's start by asking what we mean by "ethnic conflict." This is the phrase most often used to encapsulate current relations between Georgians and South Ossetians. But the tag "ethnic conflict" is inadequate. It reduces social and economic relations to "culture." It diminishes the importance of long periods of peace compared to periods of tension. And it assumes violence is the inevitable outcome of distrust among neighboring ethnic groups. Most important of all, it leaves out politics.

Distrust, prejudice, social inequality, and privilege have certainly characterized relations between Georgians and South Ossetians for decades. Core identities play a role in this conflict, and South Ossetians genuinely perceive their cultural survival to be under threat. But the violent conflicts—and my emphasis is on the word "violent"—are due to politics.

By "politics," I mean the local ambitions of "ethnic entrepreneurs," badly implemented government policies, and the neglect of national minority integration. "Politics" also includes great power provocations driven by ideological goals, and international neglect. This has been a frozen conflict for 16 years and there were plenty of signs that it could spill over into violence. International mediation remained tame and reactive.

In Georgia, ethnic violence in the 20th century has been rare. When it occurred, it was under crisis conditions involving state breakdown and economic distress—as in 1918-1921 under the impact of World War I, the collapse of the tsarist government, and the Russian civil war.

Once violence takes place, however, ethnic identities are polarized, simplified, and solidified. The Georgian-Ossetian case suggests that the "ethnicization" of these disputes—the transformation of ethnic difference into a zero-sum game of ethnically-based competition—was not spontaneous but followed the mobilization of the population by local political and intellectual elites.

The largely engineered violence of the early 1990s in South Ossetia which led to its de-facto separation was a production of the inflamed imaginations of Georgian university professors, populist leaders, and Russian ideologues. Neighboring Georgian and South Ossetian residents wanted nothing to do with the violence or extreme nationalism until they no longer had any choice.

The result was tragic—a breakdown of shared social networks and common economic interests between Ossetian and Georgian villagers and small businessmen, and the identification of ethnic solidarity with security. This led in turn to increased vulnerability to foreign intervention by Russian ideologues backed by the KGB (now FSB), resentful at the loss of former colonies. All these factors tell us more about the eruption of violence in 1989-1992 and 2008 than ethnic hatreds do.

Georgia's Minorities in Crisis? From Coexistence to Conflict

Georgia has for many centuries been a multi-ethnic state. Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Acharans, and Greeks, among others, have long shared the country with Georgians and have often played leading roles in its history.

The 2002 census listed 120 national minorities in Georgia. For all this diversity, however, Georgians today make up a greater proportion of their state than they have ever done before. In 1989, Georgians comprised 70.1% of the state's population; in 2002 it was 83.8%. But this increased ethnic homogeneity (an observable trend in Georgia since the late 1950s) has occurred not due to ethnic animosities, but—in the last 15 years at least—due to economic misery. Georgians themselves have joined a general exodus from the country, creating a dramatic fall in the country's total population from 5.44 million in 1989 to 4.36 in 2002.

"History" has long been an effective weapon for mobilizing hatred among majorities and minorities. Georgia is no exception. In the 1990s, speeches of South Ossetian politicians cast Georgians as historical oppressors. Georgians (though to be fair, neither President Eduard Shevardnadze nor President Saakashvili) characterized South Ossetians as historical interlopers who had only recently settled in Georgia.

In fact, however, South Ossetians, speakers of an Indo-European language (Iranian branch) and mostly Christian (with a Muslim minority) arrived in the Caucasus many hundreds of years ago and dispersed and intermarried among the Georgian population. Despite the inflammatory rhetoric of the 1990s, relations among Georgians and Ossetians have, on the whole, been peaceful and cooperative. The general tranquility was interrupted only by brief periods of violence that occurred at times of economic crisis and state breakdown, particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the tsarist state in 1917, and again in the 1990s following the collapse of the USSR.

In the period of the first Georgian republic (1918-1921) before the Bolshevik takeover, South Ossetians—and Abkhazians also—were concerned about their existence in a newly independent Georgia. Many joined the

Russian Bolshevik cause against the fledgling Georgian social-democratic state, but many did not. Although Georgian armed forces violently crushed the Bolshevik inspired revolts in South Ossetia, ultimately the Georgians were themselves defeated in February 1921 by the Red Army and integrated into the Soviet Union.

The new Soviet authorities in Georgia gave South Ossetia separate administrative status as an autonomous region (*oblast*) in 1922. They created borders that were never there before and provided South Ossetians, for the first time, with their own governing structures and resources.

Abkhazians, who shared a multinational Abkhazian kingdom with Georgians, Greeks and others for centuries, were also granted territorial autonomy within the USSR, first as a separate union republic associated by treaty with Georgia and after 1931, as an autonomous republic within Georgia. Abkhazians complain of Georgianization policies from the 1930s onwards when [Lavrentii Beria](#), later Stalin's secret police chief, headed the Georgian and Transcaucasian party organizations. Beria closed Abkhazian radio stations and Abkhazian language schools, Georgianized the Abkhazians' Cyrillic alphabet and began a policy of Georgian settlement. At the same time, though, Georgians (mostly Western Georgians known as Mingrelians) intermarried with the Abkhazians and coexisted with them in mixed villages and neighborhoods.

In South Ossetia, integration was even more successful. Working and intermarrying with Georgians (98,000 Ossetians in Georgia lived outside South Ossetia's borders compared to 65,000 within), Ossetians nevertheless had limited language rights. In the USSR, education in Ossetian was restricted to the elementary level and Ossetians could not compete effectively with Georgians for the best jobs without proper Georgian language skills. Residentially mixed in with Georgians, it was almost impossible to draw territorial lines around Ossetian rural regions or communities in the cities.

Things Fall Apart: The End of the Soviet Union

Yet, when the USSR collapsed, South Ossetians claimed their "own" safe territories, defending their borders, national institutions, and popular assemblies. The paraphernalia of statehood such as anthems, flags and constitutions suddenly became important. Paradoxically, despite the USSR's own anti-nationalist policies, Ossetians had learned in schools and on local Soviet TV that nations were real, meaningful, and fixed entities. Georgian nationalism in the late 1980s reinforced this sense of difference.

Ossetian groups pressed for the expansion and consolidation of their political and cultural rights. They feared the removal of Russian protection after Georgian independence, worrying that the privileges secured under Soviet affirmative action programs would be lost.

Complicating the position of South Ossetians was their anxiety over numbers. Ossetians comprised 65% of South Ossetia (the remaining 35% were Georgian), but numbered only 164,000 in the whole of Georgia. At 3% of the total population, South Ossetians would never be able to secure much influence on national life in an independent Georgian state.

The Georgian government's abolition of South Ossetian autonomy in December 1990, after the South Ossetians declared an independent South Ossetian state, was politically foolish. The Georgian perennial fear of political decentralization—reflected in a Georgian constitution, which fails to delineate local, regional, and national rights—has deepened South Ossetian distrust of the Georgian central government. (To this day a special law defining national minority rights has not been passed by the Georgian parliament, although the constitution guarantees equal rights.)

Georgia's first post-Soviet President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a former literary critic and prominent Soviet-era dissident, proved inexperienced and overtly chauvinistic. With threatening rhetoric, he only encouraged South Ossetian anxieties.

Residential unmixing and ethnic segregation involving Georgians and Ossetians accelerated. South Ossetians outside South Ossetia in Gori, Tbilisi, and elsewhere were forced to sell their homes and move out under Georgian nationalist pressures. Rising crime and unsupervised paramilitaries intensified the feeling of insecurity.

The conflict over sovereignty claims in South Ossetia from 1989-1992 broke out into urban warfare, with over 1,000 killed and many others injured or displaced. Quasi-order was restored in South Ossetia with the Russian brokered Sochi agreement of June 1992. However, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and UN precipitously and mistakenly, as it turned out, handed over the entire mess to Russian peacekeepers (officially a [Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS\)](#) member mission). The Russian peacekeepers exacerbated the conflict by backing the South Ossetians—and the Abkhazians too—and obstructed any attempts at a solution. UN and OSCE observers in both regions were sidelined.

The bloodshed of the early 1990s created lasting bitterness on all sides. But to argue that the conflicts reflected historical enmity is ahistorical and simplistic. Such arguments are a useful tool for populists and an excuse for permanent partition, but hardly truthful. In reality, although there was distrust between Georgians and South Ossetians throughout the 1980s, the violence in the 1990s and again in 2008, was engineered by populist politicians and supporting intellectuals (both Georgian and non-Georgian), by Russian pro-Soviet political activists resentful of the Union's decline, and by Georgian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian paramilitaries eager to exploit their power while the opportunity lasted.

After the physical conflicts end, distrust is deep. But there is always room for reconciliation on the ground based on what are commonly called "confidence-building measures." Despite political rogues and unabashed nationalist rhetoric in the 1990s Georgians and South Ossetians in the villages and small towns continued to work and trade with one another.

However, in the 1990s, the conflict dynamic changed. Now smugglers, soldiers, nationalist politicians and Russian "peacekeepers" all became invested in the preservation of conflict. Georgian and South Ossetian villagers continued to interact, but no matter how much they desired peace, power was not in their hands.

Mikheil Saakashvili, the Rose Revolution, and the Road to August 7

Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet Foreign Minister under Gorbachev, took over the Georgian presidency in 1992 after Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a coup. He led Georgia until 2003 when it was his turn to be ousted. In his eleven years at the helm, Shevardnadze was unable to resolve the separatist conflicts, although he ended outright military confrontation and kept the conflicts more or less frozen.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia were unsolved conflicts, then, when Mikheil Saakashvili was elected President in January 2004 in the wake of the Rose Revolution, a peaceful transfer of power to a new generation of leaders promising clean government, prosperity and territorial unity.

Saakashvili's approach to national minorities and the conflict in South Ossetia has been a mix of tough talk, humanitarian aid and economic development, force, and negotiation. Saakashvili is first and foremost a state-builder. His heroes are Ataturk, De Gaulle and Georgia's own historic state unifier: King David the Builder

(1089-1125). He understands that integration of Georgia's minorities into the Georgian state is essential to effective statehood, and is willing to accept a federal state to achieve it.

However, his attempt to seize the initiative in South Ossetia by force in the summer of 2004, which led to dozens of deaths, was a bad start. It intensified mutual distrust and almost ended in war. It was followed by a Georgian "humanitarian offensive" in South Ossetia, including the construction of cinemas, the opening of banks and pharmacies, and promises of restitution for property lost or destroyed during the conflict (they remained promises).

At the same time, negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE, which had helped establish the dysfunctional Joint Control Commission peacekeeping framework in South Ossetia, stalled. Georgia's offers of autonomy for South Ossetia included the establishment of a separate executive branch and a parliament, which according to Saakashvili in a speech in 2005 would "control...issues such as culture, education, social policy, economic policy, public order, the organization of local self governance, and environmental protection." There would be language guarantees and meaningful representation in the center. These offers were rebuffed by the South Ossetian government—with Russian encouragement—as not enough.

In 2006, the frustrated Saakashvili set up an alternative administration in Georgian-held South Ossetian territories under the leadership of Dmitri Sanakoev, an Ossetian and former prime minister of the secessionist South Ossetian region. The hope was that Sanakoev could persuade South Ossetians that a federal relationship with Georgia was better than a besieged South Ossetia under Russian tutelage. But Russia, ostensibly protecting the interests of South Ossetians, was obstructive and ended any serious consideration of power-sharing or negotiations.

Russia's role illustrates the ideological and political strands that underlie the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. South Ossetia is not an open democratic system. It is pro-Russian and like Russia, authoritarian in style. South Ossetians (like Abkhazians) publicly advocate "independence," but the only realistic prospect is union with Russia. South Ossetians have accepted Russian citizenship in large numbers, though that is most likely for practical reasons, including the receipt of Russian pensions.

However, there are genuine sentiments for national liberation. Most South Ossetians wish to merge with North Ossetia across the Caucasus range which lies within the Russian Federation. Independence for South Ossetia, given its size, location, and Russia's own strategic interests in the region, is a very insecure option, but union with the much larger North Ossetia promises sanctuary in numbers (Ossetians in the northern part make up almost half a million).

Ironically, given the absence of any genuine decentralization of power in Russia, South Ossetians could probably achieve more self government within Georgia than in Russia where the President appoints the leaders of federal republics like North Ossetia.

The Future

This war was a miscalculation by all involved, including the Russians. The future is bleak. Blood has been spilt again and whatever trust was reestablished after 1992 has been destroyed along with the villages and lives of the victims. Claims for ethnically based borders supported by the Russian military have been reinforced—an unhistorical, unnatural and unproductive situation for all local residents trying to establish a decent and prosperous life for themselves and their children.

All have lost out from the war, even the South Ossetians who are rejoicing in their victory. The South Ossetian population has declined in the last decade due to economic conditions and physical insecurity. After August 2008, another 30,000 Ossetians left for Russia. Will they return?

The Russian victory brings little prospect of change: jobs, investment, or cultural development for the South Ossetians are as far away as ever despite Russian government promises. It is unclear that owning a Russian passport gives South Ossetians full citizenship rights, including the right to reside and work legally in Russia. Economic rehabilitation will be slow, and dependence on Russia will increase.

Before August, the vague prospect of de-militarization and greater democracy in South Ossetia as part of UN and OSCE sponsored negotiations was distant, but now it has been replaced by re-militarization, Russian military bases, and resurgent nationalism. It is unlikely that moderates on any side will be able to raise their voices for some time. The door has closed for decades.

The hope is that international peacekeepers will take a forceful role in rehabilitation, reconciliation, and peacekeeping, something they failed to do in the preceding decade. The solution is not reinvesting in military defense, but in economic development, trade, and dialogue, and the return of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) to their homes

Realistically, too much depends on the Russian leadership. Ultimately only its removal and the establishment of democracy in Russia will open the door to reconciliation in South Ossetia.

However, Georgia can make a contribution in the meantime by rethinking its nationality policy and improving the integration of its national minorities. The current emphasis on rearming and blaming Russia for everything is not productive. The example of a prosperous and democratic Georgian society sensitive to the concerns of its national minorities will be the only reason for South Ossetians to accept a lasting reunion with Georgia.

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ENDNOTES

[Lavrentii Beria](#): Beria was an important Georgian politician during the early Bolshevik period. He was a member of the secret police in Georgia and was instrumental in establishing Bolshevik rule in there in 1921. By 1931, he was the Secretary of the Communist Party in Georgia, and an important agent for Stalin. In the mid 1930s, Beria became chief of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus under Stalin. He was top deputy of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) during the Great Purge. After World War II, Beria rose to greater prominence, becoming one of Stalin's top deputies, with responsibilities in the secret police. He was present at Stalin's death, and was one of the major players in the immediate post-Stalin leadership struggle, but was arrested in 1953 and found guilty of treason, terrorism, and counterrevolutionary activity while he was organizing Bolsheviks in Georgia and Azerbaijan. He was executed in December.

[Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS\)](#): The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization formed after the fall of the USSR, consisting of the former Soviet Republics, including all of them

except for the three Baltic states. The CIS works towards coordinating free trade zones and inter-member crime and security issues. The CIS has chartered organizations for an interstate bank, a broadcasting company, and a number of economic councils. Some of the member countries have also signed collective security agreements. Georgia has declared its intent to leave the CIS in light of the current issues with Russia.

Suggested Reading

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3. Thomas Goltz, *Georgia Diary: a Chronicle of War and Political Chaos in the Post-Soviet Caucasus* (M.E. Sharpe, 2006)
4. Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire : North Caucasus mountain peoples and the Georgian frontier, 1845-1917* (McGill-Queen's University Press, ©2002)
5. Stephen F. Jones, "Revolutions in Revolutions within Revolution: Minorities in the Georgian Republic" in *The Politics of Nationality and the Erosion of the USSR*, edited by Zvi Gitelman (St. Martin's Press, 1992), 77-101.
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7. Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford University Press, 2008)
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9. Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, 1988)
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11. Cory Welt, "Balancing the Balancer: Russia, the U.S., and Conflict Resolution in Georgia." *Global Dialogue* 7.3-4 (2005): 22-36.

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